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Drama and Life



# DRAMA AND LIFE

BY

A. B. WALKLEY

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Drama and life.



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#### NOTE

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A. B. W.



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# DRAMA AND LIFE

## MODERN ENGLISH AND FRENCH DRAMA

WHAT do we mean precisely by "modern" and "ancient"? Each term implies the other, and Messrs. Taper and Tadpole are not the only phrase-mongers who have found it impossible to keep them apart. It was Mr. Taper, according to the author of *Coningsby*, who suggested to Mr. Tadpole the electioneering cry of "Our Young Queen and our Old Institutions."

"The eyes of Tadpole sparkled as if they had met a gnomic sentence of Periander or Thales; then, turning to Taper, he said:

"What do you think of "ancient" instead of "old"?"

"You cannot have "Our Modern Queen and our Ancient Institutions," said Mr. Taper."

Ingenious writers sometimes amuse themselves by explaining how many things that pass for ancient are of all things most modern; how the Darwinian hypothesis may be discovered lurking in the speculations of some forgotten Greek philosopher, and how the *Pickwick Papers* may be discerned, by those who have eyes to see, in the *Odyssey*. Thus Matthew Arnold exhibited the modernity of the chattering Sicilian women in a Theocritean idyll. M. Jules Lemaître

points out how Euripides, in *Ion*, "méprise Scribe vingt-quatre siècles d'avance, ce qui est prodigieux"—as prodigious it assuredly is—and how—(he is speaking of Herondas) "certains dialogues de la *Vie Parisienne*, du *Journal* ou de *L'Echo de Paris* vous donnent une idée fort exacte de ce que furent les mimes grecs." And what chiefly interests Mr. Herbert Paul in the *Poetics* of Aristotle is the fact that they are "intensely modern."

This is to darken counsel, as well as to fly in the face of Molière's common-sense observation that "les anciens sont les anciens et nous sommes les gens d'aujourd'hui."

It may be thought that, whatever the general vagueness about "ancient" and "modern," there can be no difficulty in assigning them a precise meaning when applied to drama. There is the "ancient" drama of the Greeks and Romans, the drama about which the Examiners were expected to interrogate the Heathen Passee, with his

"notes on the rise of the Drama,  
A question invariably set;"

and there is the "modern" drama which came into being towards the end of the sixteenth century. It should not, however, be difficult to show that this line of cleavage between ancient and modern drama is misplaced.

Where then is the true line of cleavage to be found? In order to answer that question an obvious course is to examine a few typical plays, selected from successive theatrical periods, and to seek the causes which differentiate them from the drama of to-day, or rank them with it, as the case may be. By common consent, the most "modern" of all Shakespeare's plays is the tragedy of *Hamlet*. Its hero exhibits what the

nineteenth century was fond of calling "la maladie du siècle," as something pre-eminently its own. His case is, in Shelley's phrase, "a pure anticipated cognition" of the late lamented Henri Frédéric Amiel. Hazlitt discerned a Hamlet in all modern men. Musset wrote a *Lorenzaccio* so rife with Hamletism that Mme. Sarah Bernhardt, after appearing as the protagonist of that play, was in the nature of things bound to undertake the Prince of Denmark. One peculiarly "modern" novelist, Tourgenev, cannot choose but write a "Hamlet russe," while another, M. Paul Bourget, reproduces the whole story in *André Cornélis*. Then there is the veteran author of *John Gabriel Borkman*, who gives us a Hamlet, as it were, reversed, a Hamlet who makes "il gran rifiuto," and blithely refuses to take up the burden of the old generation under which the Shakespearian Hamlet was crushed. Nevertheless, it has to be asked, does *Hamlet* show the distinguishing marks of the drama as we understand it to-day? Does every scene contribute to the advancement of the story? Do every action and word take their due place in the composition of a character? Nothing of the kind. With the *data* of the play, its business, according to modern ideas, is to exhibit the progress of the conflict between Hamlet's temperament and his duty, between his irresolution and his revenge "mission." But this business is persistently neglected. Any irrelevance serves to set Hamlet off at a tangent. While he is waiting on the platform at Elsinore for the Ghost, someone drops an observation about the King keeping "wassail," whereupon he moralises upon the general passion for strong drink. Meanwhile the

play marks time. When the players arrive, Hamlet puts aside his revenge project in order to deliver a lecture upon histrionics. If he meditates on suicide, he must bring in a reference to the law's delay and the insolence of office — matters which have nothing to do with his case. In the church-yard he must "draw" the gravedigger. It is in complete forgetfulness of his "mission" that he accepts the challenge to a bout of fence with Laertes. His mind, on this side of it, is like Squire Brooke's, "a jelly that runs easily into any mould." The obvious truth is that Shakespeare, having, as Walter Bagehot said, the "experiencing temperament," must needs endow Hamlet with that temperament too. He expressed himself in Hamlet in disregard of dramatic propriety. The story might get on as best it could; what he was intent upon was exhausting the possibilities of the moment—"enjoying the moment for the moment's sake," as Pater might have said. The same disregard of dramatic propriety runs through the other characters. Polonius, a fool at one moment, is a sage at another, so that Coleridge was driven to contend that he is not a comic character. Laertes cannot take leave of his sister without generalisations about princes' love and maidens' modesty, so that, only half in jest, a former Examiner of Plays described him as an instance of heredity.<sup>1</sup> Gertrude, rushing in with the shocking news of Ophelia's death, pauses to deliver a set piece of poetic description—

"There is a willow grows aslant a brook,"

---

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Bodham Donne. See *More Letters of Edward FitzGerald*, p. 131: "Had any one quoted to me Laertes' parting advice to his sister, I should have sworn it was Polonius." Donne thinks that Shakespeare may have intended pedantry in the blood."

with eighteen lines to follow—during which Laertes has to stand aside and bottle up his emotion. It comes to this, that, any topic once started, Shakespeare proceeds to expatiate upon it at large, and he is comparatively indifferent as to which character shall be his mouthpiece or to the progress of the dramatic action. Clearly *Hamlet* bears the marks of something essentially different from a “modern” play.

To draw attention to these points of technical method is not, of course, to call in question for a moment the virtues of *Hamlet* as a poetic tragedy, its “noble excess” as the *fine fleur* of Renaissance romanticism, its triumphant fulfilment of the test laid down by Goethe for all work really classic—namely, that it shall be “energetic, fresh, and well-loving.” Such aspects of the matter are beyond discussion. But Shakespeare was no more free than any other man from the material limitations of the theatre in which his plays were produced; and it is in those material conditions that the explanation of his craftsmanship is to be found. Yet how seldom is that explanation sought in this the only proper quarter! We have seen S. T. Coleridge and Bodham Donne, two men of letters, explaining Polonius, one solemnly, the other only half jocularly, by purely literary and logical means. To this day our Shakespearian commentators, in the seclusion of their studies, pursue this false method—the bookman’s method—of exegesis. If they would only come out of their studies and look at the stage—at some picture or model of the Elizabethan playhouse—they would save themselves the discovery of many mares’ nests. There was not long ago a project for the erection of an Elizabethan playhouse in *facsimile*, as a Shakespeare memorial,

in one of the new London thoroughfares. I can perceive one, and only one, good reason for this otherwise fanciful scheme; it would provide an object-lesson for the bookmen. Meanwhile one may refer them back to their Aristotle. The author of the *Poetics*—whom nothing could escape—saw the distinction between what I have called the bookman's point of view in regard to drama and that which will be taken in the present inquiry. “Whether tragedy is to be judged in itself, or in relation also to the stage (*πρὸς τὰ θέατρα*)”—that, he said, is *ἄλλος λόγος*, another question.<sup>1</sup> Here, however, it happens to be not another question, but *the* question. The bookmen have been used to consider drama exclusively “in itself.” It is high time to consider drama *πρὸς τὰ θέατρα*, in its relation to the material conditions of the stage.

This aspect of the matter, so strangely neglected, is quite simple. That has happened in the theatre which has happened in every congregation gathered round the same centre of interest. Whether it be John Wesley preaching to the miners on a Cornish hillside, or a socialist haranguing the loafers in Hyde Park, or an acrobat tumbling for pence in a by-street, he chooses his “pitch” and the crowd forms a ring. The earliest theatres, then, were naturally circular, with the stage in the centre. Naturally, too, the stage was bound to gravitate towards the circumference, in order that the performers might reach their platform and retire from it without traversing the crowd. It is superfluous to describe the minor modifications of this arrangement in the Elizabethan playhouse—everybody knows them—but it is not superfluous to point out the effects of this arrangement

<sup>1</sup> *Poetics*, ch. iv.

on the Elizabethan play. With actors on a raised platform, devoid of scenery and surrounded by the spectators on three sides, there could be no such thing as illusion, in the modern sense of the term, no attempt at a plastic reproduction of actual life. An Elizabethan actor was not, like his modern successor, a figure set in perspective in a framed picture whose conversation with his fellows is overheard by the audience. He stood forth among the crowd, hardly separated from them, and addressed them as an orator would address them. The Elizabethan drama, then, was of necessity a rhetorical drama. Each successive passage of dialogue was not so much the link between what preceded and followed it as a new "topic," which the speakers between them were expected to exhaust. The scene in itself, the scene of the moment, was everything; the logical *nexus* of the scenes nothing or next to nothing. Internal evidence of this has been adduced from *Hamlet*. A curious piece of external evidence is forthcoming from a Frenchman who visited London shortly after the Restoration, one Samuel Sorbière, whose *Relation* of his visit was published in 1667. This, to be sure, was after Shakespeare's time; but the point is immaterial, for the position of the platform stage in the playhouse was still what it had been in Shakespeare's time. Sorbière was struck by the indifference of the English audience to logical *nexus* of scenes in their drama, and gives the explanation furnished to him: "Il ne leur importe que ce soit un pot-pourri, parce qu'ils n'en regardent, *disent-ils*, qu'une partie après l'autre, sans se soucier du total." Sorbière's English friends here put him on the right track, and our bookmen should lose no time in adding

the *Relation* to their libraries. “Ne regarder qu'une partie après l'autre sans se soucier du total:” that was the inevitable frame of mind in the spectator of a platform-drama.

It is a simple fact, little suspected by the bookmen, or indeed by the common-sense students of our stage, that its history up to a period so recent as to be within the memory of people now living is the history of the platform-drama. As time went on, the dimensions of this platform gradually shrank, like the shagreen skin in Balzac’s story. A notable passage in Colley Cibber throws light on this process. As a rule, the lives of the players may be said to belong to the least important branch of entomology; but an exception must be made in favour of Cibber’s *Apology*, which is always interesting and sometimes, as in the ensuing extract, of great documentary value. Cibber is comparing Drury Lane, as altered by Rich, with the structure of the old theatre:—

“ It must be observ’d, then, that the Area or Platform of the old Stage projected about four Foot forwarder, in a Semi-oval Figure, parallel to the Benches of the Pit; and that the former lower Doors of Entrance for the Actors were brought down between the two foremost (and then only) Pilasters; in the place of which Doors now the two Stage-Boxes are fixt. That where the Doors of Entrance now are, there formerly stood two additional Side-Wings, in front to a full set of Scenes, which had then almost a double Effect in their Loftiness and Magnificence.

“ By their original Form, the usual Station of the Actors, in almost every scene, was advanc’d at least ten Foot nearer to the Audience than they now can

be; because, not only from the Stage's being shorten'd in front, but likewise from the additional Interposition of those Stage-Boxes, the Actors (in respect to the Spectators that fill them) are kept so much more backward from the main Audience than they us'd to be: But when the Actors were in Possession of that forwarder Space to advance upon, the Voice was then more in the Centre of the House, so that the most distant Ear had scarce the Least Doubt or Difficulty in hearing what fell from the weakest Utterance: All Objects were thus drawn nearer to the sense; every painted Scene was stronger; every grand Scene and Dance were extended; every rich and fine-coloured Habit had a more lively Lustre: Nor was the minutest Motion of a Feature (properly changing with the Passion or Humour it suited) ever lost, as they frequently must be in the Obscurity of too great a Distance."

Here is a striking confirmation of the view already set forth that the rhetorical drama was what the mathematicians would call a "function" of the platform-stage. The histrionic elements which Cibber singles out for mention are elements of rhetoric—the "voice," the "utterance." Cibber talks of the actors as we should now talk of orators—just as Plato had talked of them when proposing that *καλλίφωνοι ὑποκριταί*, "the actors with their beautiful voices," should be banished from his ideal State. The stage was still essentially a platform, projecting among the audience, though already showing a tendency to withdraw towards the curtain. Spectators still lined the sides of the stage as in Elizabethan times, no longer seated upon it, however, but placed in "stage-boxes." A full century passed and we find Jane Austen, in 1813 ("September 15,

$\frac{1}{2}$  past 8"—“documentary” evidence is not always so precise)—writing from London to her sister Cassandra: “I talked to Henry at the play last night. We were in a private box—Mr. Spencer’s—which made it much more pleasant. *The box is directly on the stage.* One is infinitely less fatigued than in the common way.”<sup>1</sup> Well into the last century, then, the boxes which Cibber had seen placed at the side of the stage were still in their old position. The stage remained even then, to all intents and purposes, a platform-stage.

These facts account for the form not only of the Restoration but of the Georgian drama. The Restoration plots were beneath contempt. Who can remember Congreve’s? From the modern point of view his *dénouements* are childish; some sudden “discovery,” some hasty production of “a certain parchment,” brings down the curtain to a general song and dance. “What,” says Witwoud at the close of *The Way of the World*, “are you all got together, like players at the end of the last act?” The players are, in fact, always got together, and the final direction is “*Exeunt Omnes.*” Congreve, to be sure, made some pretence to concern for the logical *nexus* of his plot. In his Epistle Dedicatory to *The Double Dealer*, he asserts that “the mechanical part of it is regular. I made the plot as strong as I could because it was single, and I made it single because I would avoid confusion, and was resolved to preserve the three unities of the drama.” But in practice Congreve’s notion of orthodoxy was rather like that put into the mouth of one of his personages—“Orthodox is Greek for claret.” Who cares about what is going to happen next in *The Way of the World?* Each scene of raillery between

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Jane Austen*, ed. Lord Brabourne (1884), vol. ii. p. 147

## MODERN ENGLISH AND FRENCH DRAMA II

Millamant and Mirabell is self-contained. In the feigned madness of Valentine in *Love for Love*, there is a riot of rhetoric. "Mad scenes" were a constant feature of the platform-drama, because they gave the freest opportunity for bombastic, or discursive, or lyrical declamation. Valentine repeats some of Hamlet's very phrases. "Sir," said Johnson of Garrick and *Irene*, "the fellow wants me to make Mahomet run mad, that he may have an opportunity of tossing his hands and kicking his heels." Tilburina went mad in white satin. The stage vogue of lunacy in those days is only to be matched by the vogue of hysteria—the hysteria of the *Saphos* and the *Zazas*—in our own. The contrast is worth passing notice, as showing how the change from the platform to the modern picture-stage has affected the field of histrionic representation, even in the matter of physical ailments. As to Congreve's practice, it accorded, whatever he may have said, with the theory of Vanbrugh, which was the true theory of the platform-stage. "I cou'd say a great deal against the too exact observance of what's called the Rules of the Stage, and the crowding of a Comedy with a great deal of Intricate Plot. I believe I cou'd show, that the chief entertainment, as well as the Moral, lies much more in the Characters and the Dialogue, than in the Business and the Event."<sup>1</sup> And why? The justification had already been anticipated by Sorbière: "Il ne leur importe que ce soit un pot-pourri, parce qu'ils n'en regardent qu'une partie après l'autre, sans se soucier du total."

We have seen that Congreve by no means practised what he preached. The fact is, in his theories of drama

<sup>1</sup> From Vanbrugh's reply to Jeremy Collier in *A Short Vindication*, 1698.

he was curiously ahead of his age. "In any part of a play," he says, "if there is expressed any knowledge of an audience, it is insufferable."<sup>1</sup> That would be true of our modern illusion-stage; it was not true of the platform-stage. In the rhetorical drama the actor, under the pretext of conversing with his fellows, was in reality talking at his audience. The original players of the *The School for Scandal*, as Elia pointed out in a famous essay, surpassed their successors precisely because they recognised this. The "teasings" of Sir Peter (while King acted it) were evidently as much played off at you as they were meant to concern anybody on the stage. The original players gave the true spirit of the play because they treated it frankly as a piece of rhetoric. Kemble is singled out by Lamb on this very account. "His exact declamatory manner" (in Charles Surface) "as he managed it, only served to convey the points of his dialogue with more precision; it seemed to head the shafts, to carry them deeper. Not one of his sparkling sentences was lost." This was over a hundred years ago. To-day every so-called "revival" of *The School for Scandal* is an absolute counter-sense. What was written as a platform-play is presented as a picture-play.

But the platform-play died hard. It even survived the platform. It was kept alive by a succession of declamatory actors steeped in the traditions of the platform-stage, from Kemble and Siddons to Macready and Phelps. An amusing side-light is thrown on those traditions by the descriptions of amateur theatricals so frequent in the women novelists of the "palmy days"—Miss Burney, Miss Ferrier, and Jane Austen. Lionel (in *Camilla*) "returned to ask who would come

<sup>1</sup> Dedication to *The Double Dealer*.

forth to spout with him." "Spouting" was the proper business of the platform-stage. An amateur actor (*in Patronage*) is condemned because "he would regularly turn his back upon the audience"—an absurdity on a platform-stage, a perfectly legitimate effect on our modern illusion-stage. M. Antoine, when he played *La Mort du Duc d'Enghien* in London a few years ago, turned his back upon the audience throughout a long scene. Perhaps the best indirect evidence that a play was naturally assumed to be a piece of rhetoric, and that acting was identical with spouting, is supplied by Miss Austen. When the private theatricals at Mansfield Park were afoot, Tom Bertram asserted of his father that

"for anything of the acting, spouting, reciting kind, I think he has always a decided taste. I am sure he encouraged it in us as boys. How many a time have we mourned over the dead body of Julius Cæsar, and *to be'd*, and not *to be'd*, in this very room, for his amusement! And I am sure, *my name was Norval*, every evening of my life through our Christmas holidays."

All that Mr. Yates, another of the amateurs, demanded from a part, we are told, was "good ranting ground," and his great objection to one character was that "there was not a tolerable speech in the whole." This remark, curiously enough, gets repeated almost word for word by the old-fashioned tragedian in Mr. Pinero's *Trelawny of the Wells*, who objects to a new piece that "there isn't a speech—not what you call a real speech—in it."

Gradually the platform-drama sank into the inanimate or semi-animate condition of a "survival." The sham Elizabethanisms which passed for tragedy were beginning to pall. Thomas Lovell Beddoes called the

drama of his time "a haunted ruin," and advocated the policy of "a clean slate." "Say what you will," he wrote, "I am convinced the man who is to awaken the drama must be a bold trampling fellow—no reviver even, however good. These re-animations are vampire cold. . . . With the greatest reverence for all the antiquities of the drama, I still think we had better beget than revive." The works of Talfourd and Sheridan Knowles—nay, even *Money* and *The Lady of Lyons*—were rhetorical plays, and are now, indeed, "vampire cold." One of the latest efforts to keep the old art alive was *The Patrician's Daughter* of Westland Marston (1842), which aimed at establishing "the principle of characters talking poetically in plain dress"—a principle which resulted in the description of a marriage settlement by a family solicitor as

"the accustomed deed  
Determining the rights and property  
Of such as stand affianced."

When some years later one of the last of the rhetorical actors quitted the stage, Tennyson addressed a sonnet to "Macready, moral, grave, sublime," and in the last epithet hit off the ideal of platform tragedy. Rhetorical comedy had its "sublimities" too. In Dion Boucicault's *London Assurance* (1841) Grace Harkaway talks as no young lady ever talked in 1841, or, we may be sure, in any other year, but as players were expected to talk in the platform period of drama:—

"I love to watch the first tear that glistens in the opening eye of morning, the silent song that flowers breathe, the thrilling choir of the woodland minstrels, to which the modest brook trickles applause; these,

## MODERN ENGLISH AND FRENCH DRAMA 15

swelling out the sweetest chord of sweet creation's matins, seem to pour some soft and merry tale into the daylight's ear, as if the waking world had dreamed a happy thing, and now smiled o'er the telling of it."

Then there is Lady Gay Spanker's description of the hunt and its emotions:—

" Time then appears as young as love, and plumes as swift a wing. Then I love the world, myself, and every living thing—a jocund soul cries out for very glee, as it would wish that creation had but one mouth that I might kiss it."

These, and such as these, were the "real speeches" to which Mr. Pinero's broken-down actor referred.

Surely here is ample evidence that down to the very middle of the last century the modern English drama, the drama as we know it to-day, had not come into being. From the reign of Queen Elizabeth right into the reign of Queen Victoria there had been a continuous tradition of a stage technique which is not ours. It was a technique, as has been seen, conditioned by the material arrangements of the playhouse, and chiefly by the situation of the stage with respect to the audience. The history of the gradual modification of that technique is the history of the gradual withdrawal of the stage from the pit to the curtain line. Here, then, is another of the many cases in which art has been shaped less by its own inherent needs than by external causes, economic and social. For it was the pressure of population that step by step forced the stage back into its present place—changed it from a platform into the lower plane of a framed picture. While the number of London theatres was strictly limited by

privilege, the number of people desiring to frequent them steadily increased. Rich, as we have seen, in Cibber's time, tried to meet the increasing demand by contracting Drury Lane stage in order to expand the pit. But this measure was insufficient, and every time Drury Lane was burnt down it rose from its ashes more vast than before, until the younger Colman declared that a semaphore was needed to signal the actions of the players to the occupants of the topmost gallery. The result was twofold: the shrinking of the stage made it as absurd to retain the old rhetorical methods of the platform drama as the enlargement of the house itself made it impossible to abandon them. In such conditions no new drama could be born. That was not possible until the privilege of the "patent houses" was abolished, and theatres could be built of reasonable size and in sufficient numbers to satisfy the popular demand. The necessary change was effected by the Theatres Regulation Act of 1843, which established free trade in drama. In addition to freedom, the change meant specialisation. A patent house had been justly called by Charles Matthews "a huge theatrical omnibus." When Macready took over Covent Garden in 1837, he had to provide a company for tragedy, another for comedy, a third for opera, to say nothing of a staff of pantomimists. Now every manager was free to form a repertory suited to his house and the talents of his players. The stage was in the picture-frame, rhetoric an anachronism, and the natural action and talk of actual life a possibility. From this moment the birth of the modern drama in England was only a question of time.

In what way and to what extent the drama is a "function" of the stage on which it is played should

now be clear. The transformation of the old drama of rhetoric into the modern drama of illusion is the artistic outcome of a mechanical transformation—the transformation of the platform-stage into the picture-stage. This process of evolution is, of course, not peculiar to England. Throughout Western Europe it has been the same story—the platform superseded by the picture theatrical monopoly superseded by free trade, rhetoric superseded by illusion. The only foreign theatre, however, with which we need concern ourselves is the French, for that is the only foreign theatre which has exercised a continuous and vital influence upon our own. It is a noteworthy fact that, whatever other differences there may have been between the French and English stages, there has been next to no difference in the particulars which we have been considering. It is sufficient to say that down to 1759 spectators lined both sides of the Parisian stage, being actually seated upon it, and that, placed in boxes, they continued to line it until the eighteenth century had come to a close. A well-known drawing by Moreau le Jeune, illustrating the crowning of Voltaire's bust at the Théâtre Français in 1778, shows these side-boxes and shows, too, how far the stage projected as a platform into the auditorium. When, then, did the picture-stage make its appearance in France? A casual entry in the *Journal des Goncourt*, curiously enough, supplies the answer:—

“*Dimanche, 31 Mars, 1861.—Déjeuner chez Flaubert avec Sari et Laugier, et conversation toute spéciale sur le théâtre. . . . Ce n'est que depuis ce siècle que les acteurs cherchent en leurs silhouettes l'effet tableau: ainsi Paulin Ménier montrera au public des effets de dos pris aux dessins de Gavarni; ainsi Rouvière*

apportera à la scène les poses tordues et les épilepsies de mains, des lithographies du *Faust* de Delacroix."

It is piquant to find a French actor deliberately essaying those very "effets de dos" for which, as we saw, the amateur in Miss Ferrier's *Patronage* was ridiculed. With the "effet tableau" the modern French drama has arrived.

It arrived a little in advance of our own, and it is not very difficult to see why. For one reason, theatrical "privilege"—we have already seen the relation between that and the rhetorical drama—was abolished earlier on the other side of the Channel than on this. Article I. of a decree of the National Assembly, dated November 19, 1791, runs as follows:—"Tout citoyen pourra éléver un théâtre public, et y faire représenter des pièces de tous les genres." It is true that monopoly was restored by an imperial decree of 1807, and that France had to wait for the definitive establishment of free trade in drama until 1864. But the point is that, decrees or no decrees, for full fifty years before theatres began to multiply in London they were numerous in Paris, and their number steadily increased.<sup>1</sup> A much more important reason, however, for French priority in modern drama is to be found not in the history of French institutions, but in the mental constitution of the French race. It is a race with a peculiar turn for logic; and even when the drama of both countries was acted upon a platform-stage this peculiarity of the French gave a symmetry of

<sup>1</sup> Eleven in 1791, eighteen in 1829, twenty-one in 1833. See, on the whole question, Pougin, *Dictionnaire du Théâtre*, 1885, art. "Liberté des Théâtres."

structure and a progressiveness of development to their drama which were not to be detected in ours. In ours we have seen the platform-stage producing two effects—discursive rhetoric and a certain discontinuity of action. It was this second effect which struck the attention of our French visitor Sorbière, in that an English play seemed to him a *pot-pourri*. Our playgoers, as they admitted to him, considered only each facet of the play as it came into view, without regard to the play as a whole. But the French, with their logical instinct, did care for the play as a whole, and were concerned not merely for each scene as it passed, but for its relation to the other scenes, for the *growth*, that is to say, of the action. Here was the difference between the French platform-drama and ours. Theirs was quite as rhetorical; indeed, it was far more rhetorical. From Racine to Voltaire, from Voltaire to Campistron, there was a maximum of tirades, "confidences," monologues, "forensic" dialogues—all the artifices of rhetoric—to a minimum of action. Another racial characteristic, no doubt, contributed to this excess of rhetoric: I mean the French turn for didactic moralising. French tragedy might or might not be a poem; it was always a sermon. Thus Sterne, while professing to think French tragedies "absolutely fine," significantly added, "and whenever I have a more brilliant affair upon my hands than common, as they suit a preacher quite as well as a hero, I generally make my sermon out of 'em; and for the text, Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, is as good as any one in the Bible." This persistent didacticism of French drama found its *reductio ad absurdum* in both the theory and the practice of

Diderot. "It is always," said he, "virtue and virtuous people that a man ought to have in view when he writes. Oh, what good would men gain if all the arts of imitation proposed one common object, and were one day to unite with the laws in making us love virtue and hate vice!" In Diderot's *Père de Famille* a father addresses his child in this strain: "Marriage, my daughter, is a vocation imposed by Heaven. . . . If marriage exposes us to cruel pain, it is also the source of the sweetest pleasures. . . . O sacred bond, if I think of thee, my whole soul is warmed and elevated." Mr. John Morley's comment on this passage is much to the point. If the drama is to be a great moral teacher, "it will not be by imitating the methods of that colossal type of histrionic failure, the church pulpit."<sup>1</sup> It may be added that the moralising strain in French drama is to be found a full century after Diderot in the *raisonneurs* of the younger Dumas. But the important fact is that with all this excess of moralising rhetoric over action, the French turn for logic had its way. Such action as there was tended steadily to an ordained end, never zigzagging or marking time or deviating into mere irrelevance, as was, for the most part, the case with our English platform-drama. Logical, well ordered, as French drama was by comparison with our own, it was not logical enough for the French critics. The aim of their playwrights is all the more unmistakable from the frequency with which they deplored failure to attain it. We have heard Diderot as a dramatist, but listen to him as a critic of drama:—

"En général il y a plus de pièces bien dialoguées, que de pièces bien conduites. Le génie qui dispose

<sup>1</sup> *Diderot*, vol. i. p. 327 (1886).

les incidents paraît plus rare que celui qui trouve les vrais discours. Combien de belles scènes dans Molière ! On compte ses dénouemens heureux. On serait tenté de croire qu'un drame devrait être l'ouvrage de deux hommes de génie, l'un qui arrangeât et l'autre qui fit parler.”<sup>1</sup>

Here is Diderot virtually passing the very criticism on Molière that I have passed on Congreve. In both the dialogue surpasses the “conduct of the fable.” How many “belles scènes” in both ! How few “dénouemens heureux” ! And by this time the cause of the resemblance between the two national dramas, in so far as resemblance there was, ought to be manifest enough ; it was the common factor in each, the platform-stage, always favourable to rhetoric and unfavourable to the strict ordering of plot. But there is this great difference between the two cases, that the French spirit, its turn for logic, almost from the first reacted against the influence of the platform-stage, whereas the English did not. Nothing could be more significant on this head than a remark of Voltaire’s in his commentary on Horace. “Tout doit être action dans la tragédie,” he says ; “chaque scène doit servir à nouer et à dénouer l’intrigue, chaque discours doit être préparation ou obstacle.” Voltaire failed to observe his own precepts ; but he has here stated in the clearest terms what is nothing else than the ideal of modern drama.

For that ideal, whatever else it may cover, includes simplicity and strict economy of plot, and in these respects the French have always been ahead of us. Go back as far as “that memorable day, in the first

<sup>1</sup> Diderot, *De la poésie dramatique*.

summer of the late war, when our navy engaged the Dutch”<sup>1</sup> (June 3, 1665), and you will find the English and the French ideals compared by Dryden. It was one of the objects of his *Essay*, as all readers know, to contrast the two national theatres and to make the best case he could for the English. Lisideus, the advocate for France, observes that “another thing in which the French differ from us is that they do not embarrass or cumber themselves with too much plot; they only represent so much of a story as will constitute one whole and great action sufficient for a play; we, who undertake more, do but multiply adventures, which, not being produced from one another, as effects from causes, but barely following, constitute many actions in the drama, and consequently make it many plays.” To which Dryden, in the character of Neander, answers by decrying the “barrenness” of the French plots and praising the “variety and copiousness” of the English. But the point is that he never attempts to dispute Lisideus’s main fact: “The French carry on one design, which is pushed forward by all the actors, every scene in the play constituting and moving towards it.”

It was because the French did this, even in the period of the platform-stage, that, so soon as that stage had given place to the picture-stage, they were the first to create what is legitimately entitled to be called modern drama. Literary historians, each docilely repeating the commonplaces of his predecessors, were for long accustomed to trace the modern French drama back to the great Romantic movement of the thirties. The best opinion of to-day is dead against that attribution. What is there in the contemporary French theatre that can be shown to owe its origin

<sup>1</sup> *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*: opening paragraph.

to Romanticism? People talk of a "romantic" revival, but these are the people who cannot see any further than Cyrano's nose. M. Rostand's plays are "romantic" in a sense—because the word "romance" can be used in almost any sense, the sense of anti-classicism or of anti-realism or of mere troubadourism—and out of these senses one or more can be found to fit M. Rostand. But *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *L'Aiglon* and *La Princesse Lointaine* are not romantic in the sense of 1830. Must we come to the conclusion that the Romantic movement was merely an episode in the history of the French stage? We can hardly recognise Victor Hugo's plays as modern drama; they belong to the old drama of rhetoric. Every one of them is based upon an antithesis—a king at odds with a bandit, a queen enamoured of a lackey, a court fool turned tragic protagonist—and antithesis is a figure of rhetoric. Rhetoric, the monologue of Charles Quint before the tomb of Charlemagne. Rhetoric, the "scène des portraits." Rhetoric, the address of Ruy Blas to the ministers. That grotesque document the preface to *Cromwell*, so far as it had any intelligible meaning whatever, meant a rhetorical dramaturgy. The author of *Hernani* was not the first of the modern dramatists; he was the last of the rhetoricians. So much was written about the excitement over the "première" of *Hernani*, to say nothing of Gautier's red waistcoat, that at last the public was fooled into believing that there must be something in it. The legend grew up, and "epoch-marking" became the cant word about it. But an ounce of fact is worth a pound of legend. And the fact is that the first of the moderns was the author of *Antony*, a play which substituted for the Romantic formula a brand-new formula of its own.

Here at last was a tale in plain (indeed, in bad) prose about the actual life of the day as Dumas saw it. Dumas, to be sure, saw life neither steadily nor whole. But what he saw, or thought he saw, he took bodily into the theatre. For he was a born dramatist. *Antony* is all rapidity and fire, all action and passion. It is easy to laugh at the Byronic, Wertherian, Satanic hero. But Antony was a true type of his time, brother to Stendhal's Julien Sorel, and to the exorbitant adventurers of Balzac—the men of a generation burning with the Napoleonic fever driven inwards. This type of ferocious egoist had a long stage posterity down to the “homme fort” of Feuillet and the “strugfor-lieur” of Alphonse Daudet. Countless, too, are the descendants in French drama of Adèle d'Hervey, at once heroine and adulterous woman. But Dumas did something more important than fix types of modern stage-character. He hit in *Antony* upon the great modern dramatic theme, the conflict of passion and the social world, of the individual and opinions—the very stuff out of which his son's plays were afterwards to be made. While Dumas *père* supplied the motive power of the new drama, Scribe perfected its mechanism. It is the present fashion to speak contemptuously of Scribe, as a mere manufacturer, turning out machine-made plays by the gross. But that is because we are wise after the event. Scribe triumphantly vindicated in practice a position of Aristotle's, which has been violently but by no means intelligently assailed—the position that while you can have drama without character you cannot have drama without plot.<sup>1</sup> No doubt Aristotle overestimated the importance of plot. I suspect that he did so deliberately, in the belief that in neglect of

<sup>1</sup> *Poetics*, ch. iv.

plot lay the special pitfall for the "bas-relief" drama of his time. Be that as it may, it would be untrue to say to-day, as Aristotle said, that plot was the end of drama; but it is, assuredly, the beginning. Scribe made too much of it, made everything of it. Nevertheless, he fulfilled a purpose useful for the moment. A new craftsmanship was wanted for the picture-stage, the old craftsmanship of the platform-stage being as useless as a sedan-chair on a railway. Scribe supplied what was wanted, just when it was wanted. If he was only a craftsman, he could at least make instruments which others were to put to real use; and that is what Scribe actually did for Augier and the younger Dumas. He gave them the neat framework of the "well-made piece," and within that framework they did what he could not do, they worked out ideas of their own.

What ideas were these? Of what kind were they? What relation had they to reality, to the practical conduct of life? To answer these questions is to indicate the fundamental difference between modern French and English drama. The ideas of Augier and Dumas *fils* were ideas about society, its economic structure, its hierarchy of castes, its pressure on the individual; and they were ideas about private ethics, the relations of men and women, fathers and children, the disparity between the Civil Code and the moral law. In other words, these men made the French drama, in Matthew Arnold's phrase about poetry, a "criticism of life." That has been the vital, the prime characteristic of the French stage for half a century and more—its rule—whereas with our modern English drama it has been the exception. Only in quite recent years have one or two English plays attempted anything like a "criticism of life," and even in the rare

instances wherein these plays have been accepted by the public, they have been accepted against the grain. The English attitude in this matter is well illustrated in a brief passage of irony from the *Critic* :—

“*Mrs. Dangle.* Well, if they had kept to that [i.e. “serious” comedy from the French], I should not have been such an enemy to the stage ; there was some edification to be got from those pieces, Mr. Sneer !

“*Sneer.* I am quite of your opinion, Mrs. Dangle : the theatre, in proper hands, might certainly be made the school of morality ; but now, I am sorry to say it, people seem to go there principally for their entertainment !

“*Mrs. Dangle.* It would have been more to the credit of the managers to have kept it in the other line.

“*Sneer.* Undoubtedly, madam ; and hereafter perhaps to have it recorded that, in the midst of a luxurious and dissipated age, they preserved two houses in the capital, where the conversation was always moral at least, if not entertaining !”

What Sheridan said wittily enough over a hundred years ago the majority of English playgoers are tiresomely repeating to-day. We go to the theatre, they say, for “entertainment” ; we want to leave the world behind us, to escape from the pressure of reality ; we do not go there for a criticism of life. There is a double fallacy underlying this popular statement of the case. “Entertainment,” in the fullest sense of the term, is, of course, the aim of all drama, from the *Prometheus Bound* or *Lear* down to *Box and Cox* or *Charley’s Aunt*. Further, to treat reality as a spectacle is in the very act to relieve it of its pressure. Art, however faithfully it may follow the lineaments of life, is not life itself; it is life which

has undergone a *κάθαρσις*, life purged of the will-to-live. What the popular statement merely means is that the typical English playgoer does not find entertainment where the typical French playgoer does, in a criticism of life. And in that sense the statement is undeniable. If the English playgoer stopped there, if he were content with the admission that he found moral questions in drama a bore, whatever we might think of his intelligence, we could not contest his right to choose his own pleasures. But he goes further. He considers it "immoral" to raise moral questions on the stage. This habit he acquired, it would seem, from the moment that Dumas *fils* began to raise those moral questions. *La Dame aux Camélias* was produced in 1852. At the Theatrical Fund dinner of 1853 a speaker, after admitting that the English owed much to the French stage (it was, indeed, living upon French adaptations), went on to say: "But we should limit our obligations to the French, in order to keep our own drama pure; and, in availing ourselves of their art, we should be careful to avoid their immorality." Unfortunately, his very next sentence gave the case away. "We cannot be insensible to the changes that are taking place around us in our theatres. Covent Garden is given up to the seductions of a foreign opera, and the legitimacy of Old Drury is displayed by the antipodean feat of a gentleman who walks on the ceiling with his head downwards."<sup>1</sup> Such was the result of "availing ourselves of French art," in so far as it was mere amusement, and of "limiting our obligations" so as to keep out anything like a criticism of life. The French playgoer was being introduced to the master-

<sup>1</sup> *Dramatic Register* for 1853.

pieces of Augier and Dumas *fils*, while the English playgoer was gazing at a gentleman walking upside down. Fortunately, we have done something since towards mending our ways. The contrast between the two stages has long ceased to be as tragi-comic as it was in 1853. But it is still sufficiently humiliating. It is no exaggeration to say that while in the intervening half-century every social and ethical question of importance has found its way into the French theatre, from the English theatre all, or nearly all, such questions have been rigorously excluded.

There is no need to recite the long catalogue of plays, sufficiently well known and more than sufficiently discussed, by which Augier and Dumas *fils*, in their several ways, converted the French drama into an active social force. It is impossible to dissociate these twain, because they worked to the same end; but there is a marked difference in their work. Augier was much less of a preacher than Dumas, and much more of a *bourgeois*; but, though he had the "burgess mind," we must be cautious about disparaging a mind which has given the world *Le Gendre de M. Poirier*. He took that "respectable," comfortable, tolerant view of men and things which one finds so complacently adopted in the novels of Anthony Trollope. He disliked the "idle rich," the haughty aristocrat, the Bohemian journalist, the "Daughters of Joy"—and everything else which the *bourgeois* disliked. His plays have aged now, as Trollope's novels have aged, but, like those, they can still be read with pleasure. Notably, he was a good-humoured man; whereas Dumas, like the medical gentleman in *Pickwick* when he forbade his patient crumpets, was "werry fierce." It is the foible of earnest reformers, and Dumas believed in his mission,

and the mission of the stage, if ever man did. He ascribed to himself priestly functions. In his preface to *Le Fils Naturel* (dated 1868, though the piece was begun in 1853, the year of the topsy-turvy gentleman at Drury Lane—*annus mirabilis!*) he actually put the theatre alongside the Catholic Church :—

“ The Church is wrong to attack us, for we are both marching willy-nilly towards the same end, since we start from the same principle: the representation of the Idea by man. Under penalty of death or degradation we can only proceed, like her, by propagating the highest morality. Like her we address assemblies of men, and you cannot speak long and effectively to the multitude save in the name of the higher interests.”

The drama, he went on, was doomed “ unless we hasten to press it into the service of the great social reforms and the great hopes of humanity.” “ Inaugurons donc, he cried, “ *le théâtre utile.*” To the theorists of art for art’s sake, to say nothing of mere playhouse loafers, these may seem wild and whirling words; but to question the sincere conviction, the true vocation, of the writer is impossible. His conception of his priestly duties certainly brought him into queer company. Fallen—or falling—women became his especial care. There is an elderly rake in one of Mr. Pinero’s plays who confesses he could never approach women “ in the missionary spirit.” Dumas *fils* could do nothing else. Everyone knows how modern art has turned to account what a learned professor of the University of Finland calls the “ veiled polyandry and polygamy which lie at the bottom of modern society.”<sup>1</sup> Dumas *fils* may be considered to have exhausted all the variations and

<sup>1</sup> *The Origins of Art*, by Yrjo Hirn, p. 240.

combinations afforded by this subject. Sometimes he had the offenders taken out and shot, at other times he brought in a verdict of "Not guilty, but don't do it again." Then he attacked the Code, pleading the right to prove affiliation, the right of divorce, and the identical responsibility of both parties in cases of seduction and adultery. He did it all "in the missionary spirit," and yet the missionary never got the better of the dramatist. For, with all his ideas and moral aims, he had his father's dramatic instinct and adhered to the Scribe *technique*. He took care that his plays should always fulfil the ultimate end of every play, the end of "entertainment," so that, while appealing to Mrs. Dangle, he would also have conciliated Mr. Sneer.

And yet there was a great difference between the earlier and the later Dumas, the Dumas of *La Dame aux Camélias* and the Dumas of *Francillon*. The one play was written as M. Sarcey<sup>1</sup> said, *à la diable*, dashed off by a young fellow in the twenties who was making theatrical "copy" out of his own experience. The other was formed upon a deliberately conceived plan, to demonstrate in action a proposition about the *lex talionis* in conjugal relations. The fact is, between the two, his first piece and his last, Dumas had invented the thesis-play.

What is a thesis? In general, of course, any kind of proposition; in drama, a proposition about life and conduct. And a thesis about life and conduct necessarily implies a moral precept. "Honesty is the best policy" is a thesis; the implied precept is "Be honest." There is a general thesis at the back of every drama which makes any appeal to the intellect. Take two examples from the platform-stage. The general thesis of

<sup>1</sup> *Quarante Ans de Théâtre*, p. 191.

Shakespeare's Chronicle plays is that the king is very human, but still your king; their implied precept is "Honour the king and behave like a true-born Englishman." The general thesis of Molière's comedies is the Horatian one that nature, though you expel it with a fork, will yet recur; their implied precept is "Follow Nature, avoid affectation, and don't be a 'crank.'" But the thesis-play proper, invented by Dumas as his contribution to the picture-stage, deals with a particular proposition, and is constructed from first to last to demonstrate that proposition. It is a play, as people say, with a purpose. This is a peculiarly French product. Even the French farce-writers, the mere amusers, cannot resist a thesis. Labiche, for instance, abounds in theses. His *Voyage de M. Perrichon*—to take his most characteristic work—is framed with geometrical symmetry round the Rochefoucauldian thesis that we like the people we have benefited more than the people from whom we have received benefits. But the conscious, deliberate thesis-playwright was Dumas fils.

The later history of the thesis-play is rather curious. When Dumas died in 1895 it had already fallen into disfavour. The public had accepted his theses because of his dramatic verve inherited from his father, and because he could "tell a story" as neatly as Scribe, or as the second and greater Scribe, Sardou. If he had made the theatre an active social force, it was because of his sœv' indignation, the "fire in his belly," not because of his ratiocination. A thesis, after all, holds good only for the particular case. Gustave Flaubert hits upon this objection in one of his letters to George Sand:—"Put what genius you like into a fable, taken as an example, some other fable can be

adduced to the contrary, for *dénouements* are not conclusions. From a particular case you cannot proceed to a general induction, and those who try to do so are flying in the face of modern science, which insists upon the accumulation of innumerable facts before establishing a law." The real truth is that a dramatic thesis proves nothing, for the simple reason that you cannot prove a case by manufacturing the evidence. These were, and are, the objections to the thesis judged by the "practical reason." But if we look for the immediate causes of its temporary eclipse, we shall find them in an artistic movement. Before the end of the eighties, a new generation of French playgoers had had time to grow up since the war, and, like all new generations, it demanded a new art. For a time it seemed as though the new art had been found in naturalism. That was, of course, originally a novelistic movement, and Flaubert and Zola and Daudet all failed in the theatre, where novelists generally do fail. A dramatist, however, was not long wanting for the movement. This was Henri Becque, who in *Les Corbeaux* (1880) and *La Parisienne* (1885) established a formula for naturalism in the theatre. The ingenious plot of Scribe and Dumas and Sardou was abandoned. No "exposition," no "*dénouement*," no "sympathetic personage"; only what M. Jean Jullien, the theorist of the school, called "slices of life."<sup>1</sup> The new school found a home in the Théâtre Libre, founded in 1887 by M. André Antoine, who also instituted a new school of "naturalistic" acting for the interpretation of the new plays. After a brief career of audacities, too often merely scandalous, naturalism fell by its own excesses, but not without impressing an

<sup>1</sup> *Le Théâtre Vivant* (1892), p. 2.

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indelible mark on the stage. It left the French drama more simple in construction than it found it, more accurately observant, and, it must be added, a little more insidiously erotic. Though sexual passion had been the chosen subject of Dumas, he had always painted it in the blackest colours; it is the perpetual theme of men like Donnay and Lavedan and Porto-Riche, whose moral purpose in the exposure of its seamy side is by no means so apparent. It must be remembered that the French theatre has always been, like St. Augustine in his youth, "in love with love," from Racine to Marivaux, from Musset to Meilhac. The present men are only carrying on an historic tradition, though one may think that tradition better served by the old idealism than by the new realism.

Be that as it may, the amorists hold only a secondary position in the French drama of to-day. The primacy belongs to Paul Hervieu and Eugène Brieux. The one has been called a second Dumas, the other a second Augier; and not without reason, for they have revived the vogue of the thesis-play. But they are more austere men than their prototypes, without a tincture—they would consider it a taint—of Scribism. With them the thesis is presented in all its simplicity, naked and not ashamed. Nothing, for example, could be simpler than the thesis of M. Hervieu's *La Course du Flambeau*, a play which has been presented to Londoners by Madame Réjane. It is the familiar figure which Lucretius took from the Greek torch-race:—

"Et quasi cursores vitaī lampada tradunt."

Each generation has to sacrifice the last to itself and then itself to the next; thus is the torch of life carried on. You have a widowed mother renouncing her chance

of second marriage because her daughter is not yet married and settled; later, becoming a forger to save her son-in-law from ruin; ultimately confronted by a choice between the death of her daughter and that of her mother, the consumptive daughter needing a high altitude in the Engadine which is fatal to the grandmother's heart-disease. "Pour sauver ma fille j'ai tué ma mère," cries the heroine, or rather the middle term of the "rule of three" sum, as the curtain descends. Q.E.D. Everything in the play is conditioned not by the probabilities and proportions of life, but by the mathematical requirements of the thesis, and the consequence is that you cannot believe a word of it. Again, nothing could be simpler than the thesis of *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont*, by M. Brieux, which is that women, whether they elect to be dependent on men in either regular or irregular relations, or to be independent of men, are all equally badly off. To prove this, one of the daughters marries, another goes on the streets, and the third withers in single-wretchedness. Ultimately they compare notes, and each admits herself to be as dissatisfied as either of the other two. Indeed, the play might almost be rewritten as a mediæval morality, and called *Everywoman: or Dame Goodwife, Dame Lechery, and Dame Maidenhood*. Here, again, the thesis, not life, dictates the form of the play, which is not a play but a triangle; and once more you cannot believe a word of it. We leave the French, then, with their turn for logic more in evidence than ever. We have seen how it gave them a formula for modern drama, a vehicle for a true criticism of life. Now we see the formula piercing through the drama, and life subordinated to the criticism. The French stage is suffering from intellectual hypertrophy. Where is the

remedy to be found? Assuredly not, as some enthusiasts deceive themselves into believing, in the rhymed fantasies of M. Rostand. Practical conduct, life as we know it, is the staple commodity of French drama. This does not exclude great poetry, for a great poet will always have a "message" for his day. M. Rostand only offers it a copy of verses. An inspired schoolboy, like our own Landor, he can turn anything into metre —gasconnades, a duel, pâtisserie, a protuberant nose, the Old Guard, a battlefield, Napoleon's cocked hat, what you will. He was with difficulty dissuaded from addressing the French Academy in verse. *Jl ne manquait que ça!* No, the French drama is not to be saved by prosody. One prefers to regard Rostandism as a passing mirage, if, indeed, it be not a mirage already dispelled. If a French Ibsen . . . but a French Ibsen is a contradiction in terms. And, in any case, it is no business of ours to prescribe.

Were we English to offer the French that impertinence, nothing but their traditional politeness could save us from the obvious retort about the mote and the beam. The English stage of to-day is in little danger of intellectual hypertrophy; in mid-nineteenth century —the point at which we left it—it was in no danger at all. It was an absent-minded drama. It whistled as it went, for want of thought. And it went in another sense, it went into the *Ewigkeit*. Where is that drama now? The French drama of that date still lines our shelves—volume after volume of Augier and Dumas and even of Labiche. These French playwrights still permit themselves to be read and not seldom to be played. But who can read the *Théâtre Complet* of Bulwer Lytton or the "acting editions" of Boucicault or Tom Taylor or Charles Reade or John Oxenford?

It is impossible even to think of the early Victorian theatre without a yawn, so “unidea’d” was it, so ephemeral, so paltry and jejune. One shrinks from dwelling on this tedious theme. Our concern here is not with the imitators, the adapters, the mere purveyors, but with the elect few who have done something new—no matter whether good or bad, so long as it is new to drama—the *Fortschrittsmänner* as the Germans call them, the men who give a new lead in art. The first of these men, in the history of the modern English theatre, was T. W. Robertson. In the Robertsonian drama—which includes not merely the author of *Caste* and *Society* and *School*, but minor and coarser Robertsons like H. J. Byron and James Albery—is to be found the first intelligent employment in England of the picture-stage. A plausible representation of actual life and manners and speech, with all rhetoric and rhetorical conventions abolished, with no aim but the aim of illusion, was for the first time presented to an English playhouse audience. The world of the sixties is now so remote from us—are not the humours of its remoteness the very point of Mr. Pinero’s *Trelawny of the Wells*?—that it is odd to think of Robertson as a realist; nevertheless, a realist he was in his day. I am not referring to the “real door-handles” of *Society* or the “real snow” of *Ours*, or the other novelties of accurate *mise-en-scène* of which the history is written in the annals of the old Prince of Wales’s Theatre under the régime of the Bancrofts. These mechanical details were bound in time to be invented for the new requirements of the picture-stage, though that consideration does not detract from the credit of the actual inventors. Still less am I referring to the structure of the Robertsonian drama, the “motivation” of its plot. It

is here, of course, that realism can best justify itself—in the action and the springs of action—so that the impression produced on the spectator's mind may be the exact opposite of Judge Brack's, the impression that "these are the very things people do." Robertson was no realist in this sense. His plots are always feeble, often merely silly, and the motives of his character have little in common with those of live people. Nevertheless Robertson was a true realist in aim, and more often than not he did succeed in transferring to the stage certain types of character, the current ideals and ambient atmosphere of so much of the outside world as he had the opportunity of studying. That was a limited opportunity, no doubt; Robertson's was a cockney and a middle-class world; but then so much of England in the sixties was cockney and middle-class. This was the new, the "forward," element in Robertson's plays that ranks him among our *Fortschrittmänner*; he did, however imperfectly, bring the stage into some sort of relation to life. As with all new developments, the method was a method of exaggeration. Hawtrey and Eccles and Polly and Sam Gerridge are caricatures, but the basis of observed fact underlies them all. Hawtrey is a caricature which might have been signed "John Leech," as Eccles or Sam Gerridge might have been signed "Charles Keene." Robertson, then, accomplished something. The Robertsonian drama counts. It gave a lead, and a fairly good one, for the picture-stage. But, English in its many good qualities, it was English also in its chief defect; it was "unidea'd." Happily no quotation in proof of this statement is called for—happily, because Robertsonian prose is absolutely unreadable. *School* and *Ours* and *Caste* have been revived in quite recent

years, so that the present generation of playgoers has had ample opportunity of acquaintance with some typical Robertsonian plays. They show that, while Robertson observed his time and responded to its pressure, he had no critical ideas about it. By ideas one does not, of course, mean the puerile commonplaces of the copybook.

In harping upon this question of ideas, their presence or their absence, I do not forget that I am presenting only one aspect—important as that aspect may be—of a many-sided matter. The future historian of the English stage—unhappily the epithet “future,” which has long since become stale in this connection, is still obligatory—the future historian of the English stage will have to describe many phases of it which are here left out of account. My less ambitious endeavour is to contrast the modern French and English theatres, and that contrast turns upon the inequality in their stock of ideas: abundance, even to excess, on the one hand, on the other a lamentable penury. To such an inquiry the theatrical record for many years after Robertson’s death is scarcely relevant. Those years witnessed the rise of Henry Irving, the return of London society, at his call, to a theatre from which it had long held aloof, the gradual perfection of the art of *mise-en-scène*, and many other important things. But none of these important things had aught to do with the theatre of ideas. That suited neither Sir Henry Irving’s interesting qualities as a romantic actor nor his still more conspicuous ability as a manager, a generalissimo of stage forces. Sir Henry, to be sure, added Tennyson to our list of acted poets, but only, I fancy, with the result of bringing the world in general to the mind of Tennyson’s candid friend “Old Fitz,” who “wished

A. T. had not tried the stage.”<sup>1</sup> And, of course, there were those gorgeous Shakespearian revivals which it is a duty to remember, as well as those pseudo-poetic plays of W. G. Wills which it is a pleasure to forget. Of the Shakespearian revivals there is one thing to be said germane to the present purpose. They represented an effort to pour old wine into new bottles: to accommodate the platform-drama to the picture-stage. Charles Kean had made a similar attempt in the fifties, which failed, because the new conditions were imperfectly understood, and because public opinion had not yet escaped from the bondage of the old rhetorical ideal. In the eighties this ideal had vanished, and though a few veterans grumbled, the Lyceum experiment did achieve a certain success. It was Walter Bagehot who said that, though Eton boys might not learn much Latin or Greek, they left school with the firm impression that there *were* such languages. So the Lyceum public, all agape at the “solid sets” and the rich costumes, carried away a conviction that there had indeed been a Shakespeare. As to the difference between the old and the new styles one cannot do better than give the unconscious evidence of FitzGerald and his cronies, who had seen both. They found the scenery of the Lyceum *Much Ado* “too good,” while “Irving was without any humour, Miss Terry with simply animal spirits.”<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, of Macready’s Macbeth FitzGerald remembered the actor’s “Amen stu-u-u-u-ck in his throat.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, over-elaboration of scenery was the besetting sin of the picture-stage, as that of the platform-stage had been

<sup>1</sup> *More Letters of Edward FitzGerald*, p. 273.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Edward FitzGerald to Fanny Kemble*, p. 255.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 45.

over-emphasis of delivery or "ranting." The truth is, Sir Henry Irving stood apart. By sheer force of individuality he impressed himself on the time; he rendered signal service to the playhouse by making it once more a social institution, and to the actor's calling by making it, perhaps for the first time, an entirely respectable profession; but in the development of modern drama, as I am considering it, he took no share.

This complete, if "splendid," isolation of the Lyceum in the later eighties reminds one of those enthusiastic Parisian anglers who, so the story runs, continued to fish for gudgeon under the Pont-Neuf while the Revolution was raging overhead. The Seine might run with blood, a stray body might be hurled over the parapet, incendiary fires might "incarnadine" the sky, but still they placidly fished on. Not otherwise was the "*ancien régime*" of the theatrical world solemnly keeping up its consecrated ritual inside the Lyceum walls, while the world outside resounded with the din of two new factions, the Ibsenites and the Anti-Ibsenites. Translated by Mr. William Archer, explained and pierced to his "substantifcque moëlle" by Mr. Bernard Shaw,<sup>1</sup> played by a little band of enthusiasts and even by Mr. Beerbohm Tree, the Norwegian dramatist for a brief moment frightened the isle from its propriety. Conservative playgoers mistook for a new Reign of Terror what proved to be little more than a storm in a teacup. "Ibsenism" soon passed away without establishing itself in this country as a vital force. Nevertheless it left its mark upon our drama. Without the Ibsen episode we could hardly have had the serious plays of Mr. Pinero, of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, or of

<sup>1</sup> *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, 1891.

Mr. Sydney Grundy. Without the Ibsen episode the world would certainly have been the poorer by the brilliant dramatic vagaries of Mr. Bernard Shaw. In the eighties Mr. Pinero, who had learnt the technical tricks of the stage as an apprentice to the actor's calling, was known as the author of a series of farces brimful of "modernity" and bubbling over with wit. Then came the Ibsen movement, which gave Mr. Pinero "furiously to think." The result of his furious thinking was *The Profligate* (1889), followed by a group of plays beginning with *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* in 1890, and ending with *Iris* (1901), which represent the high-water mark of our modern English drama. They are our closest approximation to the theatre of ideas, to a criticism of life through the medium of drama. One is constrained to say approximation, for the impression left on the mind by the whole group of plays is that Mr. Pinero, in the expressive Americanism, never quite "gets there." Perhaps exception should be made in favour of *Iris*, which does not shirk the logical conclusion from its premises; but *Iris* is a character-study rather than a play, a picture of woman's weakness and self-indulgence coarsening to vice and ending in degradation worse than death. The other plays of the group, also studies in feminine perversity, but studies which show the collision of wills, and are therefore strict drama, do not offer a valid criticism of life because they shirk a real *dénouement*. The suicide of Paula Tanqueray is an arbitrary termination, not a conclusion; the "white-washing" of Agnes Ebbsmith and of the frail woman in *The Benefit of the Doubt* is logically an absurdity as well as a concession to English cant. The truth, apparently, is that Mr. Pinero has lacked the courage

to defy his audience, as Dumas *fil's* defied it and as Ibsen defied it. He has tried to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds; to be the "disinterested" artist and yet to please the "compact majority." This means a lack of single-minded purpose; we do not get ideas, but half-ideas, or adumbrations of ideas. The spectator is always asking himself: What does Mr. Pinero really think? That is not only a natural but an inevitable question about all serious drama, which, however "objective" it may be in comparison with other arts, should still be a projection, a revelation of the dramatist. In all art the really interesting thing is the "*état d'âme*," the temperament, the outlook upon life of the artist behind it. What is Mr. Pinero's "*état d'âme*"? What, in the colloquial phrase, is he driving at? Probably he would reply that he is driving at simple realism; that he gives us studies from life, as accurate as he can make them. That, however, is not to give us the drama of ideas, a criticism of life.

One is in much the same state of dubiety about Mr. Henry Arthur Jones. His language, especially in his prefaces, papers, and manifestoes, is that of an earnest man, almost a Hot-gospeller; but what is he earnest about? At first while vowing he would ne'er consent he consented to become an Ibsenite. He talked of Ibsen's "drains" or "cesspools" or whatever the elegant figure was; but he nevertheless wrote "confession" dramas under the inspiration of *The Pillars of Society*. At another moment he was inventing Ouidaesque dukes or Corellian barmaids. Then he turned to France and produced *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, which is a vulgarised *Francillon*. Two later plays, *The Liars* and *Mrs. Dane's Defence*, are tolerable

achievements from the mere "story-telling" point of view ; but what is their moral ? In the one case, that an elopement is a mistake because you will be cut by your friends and "the world," whereas it is better to be taken out to supper by a brute of a husband ; in the other, that an unprotected female, trying to conceal a doubtful "past," must expect to be bullied and hounded out of Society by a shrewd lawyer, and serve her right ! The Ibsenite *malgré lui* has now become fugleman of the compact majority ! Upon errors like *The Lackey's Carnival* and *The Princess's Nose*, with their coarseness of feeling and their provinciality of thought, it is better not to dwell. But what a chaotic output ! How is Mr. Jones's criticism of life to be disengaged from this tangle of themes and modes, schools and styles, violent affirmations and flat contradictions ? He flouts Mrs. Grundy in *Lady Susan*<sup>1</sup> and brings her in as "dea ex machinâ" for *The Liars*. He was an idealist in *The Crusaders*, and a sentimentalist in *The Dancing Girl* and a cynic in *The Tempter*, and Mr. Worldly Wiseman in *Mrs. Dane* and goodness knows what in *The Princess's Nose*. Is it permissible to suppose that a hodge-podge like this was ever inspired by any constant ideal, directed towards any definite end ? Your serious French dramatist knows his own mind and takes care that we shall know it too. The purpose of Dumas *fils* we have seen emphatically declared in the preface to *Le Fils Naturel*, and Dumas kept his word. M. Hervieu says his purpose is to plead the cause of the oppressed ; M. Brieux regards himself as the "commis voyageur de l'intellectualité." We all know, then, what these men are driving at.

<sup>1</sup> Of *malice prépense* it would seem ; see the preface to the printed play.

But what Mr. Jones or Mr. Pinero is driving at remains an inscrutable mystery.

It is a refreshment to glance for a moment at a man with real ideas and a definite purpose which he is at no pains to conceal—Mr. Bernard Shaw. No one need ask what Mr. Shaw's "message" is; he is always ramming it down our throats. For his general philosophy you have this: "The tragedy and comedy of life lie in the consequences, sometimes terrible, sometimes ludicrous, of our persistent attempts to found our institutions on the ideals suggested to our imagination, by our half-satisfied passions, instead of on a genuinely scientific natural history."<sup>1</sup> There it is, as circumstantial, and almost as long-winded, as a power of attorney. Mr. Shaw's plays are so many attacks upon what he considers our false ideals, and so many attempts to illustrate what he calls a scientific natural history. The only drawback is that "with such a being as man, in such a world as the present," Mr. Shaw's plays do not count as plays at all. They offer such a criticism of life as the average man cannot even begin to understand. Mr. Shaw assumes a world of unimpeded intellect; he addresses himself to the pure reason; his characters do not love or hate, laugh or cry, they merely argue it out. It is the Euclidean drama—or would be, if Euclid had set himself to prove that two sides of a triangle are *not* greater than the third, and that it is a vulgar error to suppose a point to be without parts or magnitude. It is better not to enter, however, into so dangerously controversial a subject as the value of Mr. Shaw's criticism of life; nor is there any need, seeing that he fails to express it in terms of drama. The essential law of the theatre is

<sup>1</sup> Preface to *Unpleasant Plays* (1898).

thought *through emotion*. No character exhibits real emotion (though occasionally there is a show of "temper") in those fascinating exercises in dialectic which Mr. Shaw miscalls plays. This fatal defect long condemned him to remain a dramatist of the study or, at best, the dramatist of a coterie. If any one of our playwrights who appeal to the public at large had only a tithe of Mr. Shaw's independence and originality of thought, to say nothing of his vivacity and wit, the reproach that the modern English drama is "unidea'd" would be heard no more.

It is, of course, irrelevant to this inquiry to consider the case of Mr. Stephen Phillips. One has been examining the modern French drama and the English on a specific point, appraising their relative contributions to a criticism of life, contrasting the ample stock of ideas in the one with the intellectual poverty of the other. The drama of beauty and mystery and passion enshrined in verse—and some of Mr. Phillips's work takes high rank in that dramatic region—stands outside the present comparison. How far the vogue of Mr. Phillips has been a vogue of pure poetry, what, on the other hand, has been the amount of its debt to two enterprising actor-managers of the moment—Mr. Alexander and Mr. Tree—may some day be an interesting question. But here it is what Aristotle would call *ἄλλος λόγος*.

*July 1902.*

## SOME FRENCH AND ENGLISH PLAYS

If it be true that every nation has the drama which it deserves, we English can scarcely plume ourselves on our present merits. Our old theatrical hands are not idly so called, for theirs is handiwork rather than head-work. If there are one or two younger men of promise, they are still in the stage in which promise makes a better display than performance. We have no Experimental Theatre, no laboratory for the cultivation of dramatic germs; and we have no Repertory Theatre, no museum for the permanent exhibition of classic specimens. One or both of these institutions may in time be provided by such organisations as the Stage Society and the Irish National Theatre; but that is mere conjecture. There is a small minority of the playgoing public which shows symptoms of discontent. Its artistic conscience, if not deeply stirred, is at any rate gently pricked. It signs manifestoes, writes to the newspapers, and in other futile ways gives vent to its suspicions that something ought to be done. But what precisely ought to be done nobody knows. Meanwhile, the music-halls, along with the theatres which are music-halls in everything but name and an atmosphere of tobacco-smoke, have it all their own way. The vast majority of the public takes its theatrical amusement, as it takes its newspaper information, in snippets. It is a public without patience, without the capacity for sustained attention, and, like Lady Teazle

when she married Sir Peter, it has no taste. To speak of the drama as an art to such a public as this is to talk a language which it does not understand, and has no inclination to learn. *Vox clamantis in deserto.*

If we turn to Paris—and in the discussion of any theatrical question it is as obligatory to turn to Paris as for a Mahomedan to turn towards Mecca—we find a not altogether unlike posture of affairs. There, also, the *café-concert* triumphs over the playhouse. There, also, the theatre of ideas has to maintain an incessant fight for life. But it continues to keep its flag flying. The *Français* has its *habitués* as well as its subvention; Antoine and Lugné Poe have their subscribers as well as their intelligent audacity. And the merely frivolous theatres, whatever we may think of their ethics, maintain a level of workmanship which, compared with that of our “musical comedies,” may almost be called intellectual. It is true that the entertainments offered by the Athénée and the Nouveautés, the Capucines and the Grand Guignol—the favourite resorts of “mundane” pleasure-seekers—are more often than not quite heartless and conscienceless; but it is also true that they are anything but silly. Paris has not been Theatropolis all these years for nothing. Its playhouses are for the most part more stuffy than ours, more uncomfortable, far less pleasant houses than ours to gossip or to lounge or to slumber in; for French audiences concern themselves far less than ours about these subsidiary matters. What they do concern themselves about is the play. By tradition and temperament the Parisian is a playgoer, and, from practice, an expert playgoer. Herein he differs from an Englishman of the same class. No doubt, in all our modern democracies the average citizen is largely

dependent on fiction for his means of realising the stratum of society in which he lives, and, still more, those strata in which he does not live. But while it is a typical English habit to seek this fiction in print and nowhere else, it is a typical French habit to seek it on the other side of the footlights.

To this constant and urgent theatrical demand in France corresponds an unfailing and abundant supply. Playwrights are as numerous in that country as beggars in Spain or Grand Army veterans in the United States. One summer the *Figaro* invited some two or three score playwrights to say how they were spending their holidays, and it appeared that they were all busy over several plays apiece for next season, plays in verse and in prose, plays of ideas and plays of mere amusement —all the items of Polonius's lengthy catalogue. The plays of ideas were, of course, a small minority, as they always must be. But plays of ideas have an importance out of all proportion to their number. It is by virtue of these plays that the theatre becomes a vital part of the national organism. It is well to call them plays of ideas not only because that is what they are, but because one may thereby hope to satisfy M. Paul Hervieu, who protests against the common label of "thesis - play" as intended to imply something essentially tiresome.

"From every piece" (says M. Hervieu)<sup>1</sup> "that is not a piece of sheer farcical foolishness, you may disengage a signification which you may, if you like, call a 'thesis.' *Le Voyage de M. Perrichon*, by Labiche, contains and demonstrates from beginning to end the 'thesis' that men prefer those whom they have

<sup>1</sup> *L'Année Psychologique*, tome x. Conversation with M. A. Binet.

benefited to their benefactors. The very titles of many plays announce a 'thesis,' if you will have the word—Vacquerie's *Souvent homme varie*; Pailleron's *L'Age Ingrat* and *Le Monde où l'on s'ennuie*; Musset's *On ne badine pas avec l'amour* and *Il ne faut jurer de rien*. The point at which a play of sentimental demonstration or social bearing begins to be called a 'thesis play' has always seemed to me as arbitrarily fixed as that where the Boulevard des Capucines becomes the Boulevard des Italiens."

This is obvious enough; so obvious, indeed, that some time ago I happened to make the same remark, and to choose the very same illustration from Labiche.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the use of "thesis-play" as a term of reproach is not without a certain justification. When M. Hervieu speaks of "disengaging" a signification, or thesis, he is really begging the question at issue. The objection to so many of these plays is that the thesis, instead of being something implied and latent in the piece, something which you may, if you will, disengage, is thrust under your nose, meets you at every turn, interrupts and in the end destroys your sense of illusion. It is the primary business of a play to persuade you that what you are witnessing has happened, or might happen. And this business is only executed to perfection when the resultant impression is one of inevitability, the feeling that the thing could not have happened otherwise. But let the dramatist for one moment excite the suspicion that this or that incident is there merely because his thesis requires it to be there, and the game is up.

The truth is that plays of ideas must, first of all, be

<sup>1</sup> See preceding article.

plays of emotion. "Primum vivere, deinde philosophari." The "idea" is excellent, as giving a meaning and unity to the play, but if it be allowed to obtrude itself so as to impair the sense of reality the flow of emotion is immediately arrested. Emotion, not logic, is the stuff of drama. A play that stirs our emotions may be absolutely "unidea'd." That is a case of emotion for emotion's sake—the typical case of melodrama. The play really great is the play which first stirs our emotions profoundly and then gives a meaning and direction to our feelings by the unity and truth of some underlying idea. Such a play, if I am not mistaken, is M. Hervieu's work *Le Dédale*. It is a play with a guiding idea—one of those ideas about sexual relationship which would have delighted Dumas *fils*—but it is also a play which sounds emotional deeps quite beyond the reach of Dumas. It aches and throbs with passion, but is chastened by a certain austerity, the vague dread of calamity to come. Its high seriousness, the dignity of its style, its torrential force, its inexorable catastrophe constitute it a real tragedy.

Its governing idea, right or wrong, is simple enough: that a woman who abandons the father of her child under the law of man does so at her peril because she is infringing a higher law of Nature. Marianne has divorced her vicious husband Max. With a child of tender years to bring up, and still in the heyday of her youth, she has every inducement to marry again; and in Guillaume she finds a second husband with all the virtues which her first husband lacked. But her second marriage is not brought about without grave difficulty. Her mother, a fervent Catholic, who cannot contemplate the marriage of a divorced person without horror, is dead against the project. That is the veto of Religion.

There is also the veto of Social Opinion. Marianne's cousin Paulette tells her that a woman cannot afford to run the risk of being seen in a drawing-room between her first and her second husband; a thing "good Society will never stand." And yet, replies Marianne, you are not ashamed to be seen in a drawing-room between your husband and another man who is secretly your lover. Oh, rejoins Paulette, the secrecy makes all the difference! This is scarcely the sort of argument to convince a woman like Marianne, the soul of frankness and loyalty. She is also a woman of clear head and strong will. All objections duly weighed, she decides that she ought to marry again; and she does.

But she has reckoned without the veto of Nature. There comes a time when Max and she are again in presence. The purport of his visit is to ask for more frequent access to their little son, and this request Marianne cannot refuse. The matter, however, does not end there. Marianne is unsettled by the sight of her first husband, who is a changed man, repentant, subdued, haggard with grief at the thought of the happiness that he has wickedly thrown away. He has no hope of recapturing the woman; nor she any fear of falling again under his sway. But the mere juxtaposition of two people whose relations, however distant now, have been of all human relations the closest, is not without its silent effect. Nothing is openly said, or even definitely realised, by either party; but the subconscious influence of sex is at work. Time, complete separation, new interests, might avert all danger. But again there is juxtaposition, and of the closest kind. The boy falls ill, and the father obtains permission to aid the mother in watching over

the sick-bed. At the moment when the child is declared to be out of danger and the father comes to take his leave, the smouldering ashes of past affection burst into flame. The woman's nerves are unstrung; she has been worn out by vigils shared with the man who once had been to her what no other man ever can be. "L'homme qui m'a rendue mère," she cries, "je ne peux pas l'arracher de mes entrailles." And so, almost automatically and unconsciously, they fall into each other's arms. It is a physical accident.

The catastrophe swiftly follows. In her hysterical anguish over the horrible trick that fate has played her, Marianne could not keep the truth to herself, even if she would. She feels that she can never again be Guillaume's wife; nor will she disgrace herself by living in open sin with Max. What is to be the way out of this *dédale*, this "maze"? Clearly there is no way out so long as all three parties remain alive. The only question is, which of the three will the dramatist kill off. Marianne? Assuredly not; there would be too savage a cynicism in leaving the two husbands flying at one another's throats over the corpse of the wife. But if Marianne is not to die, then there are tremendous objections against sparing the lives of either of the men. Kill Max, and you leave Marianne alone with Guillaume, whom she does not love and whose wife she has sworn never to be again. Kill Guillaume, and you rebuild the happiness of Max and Marianne over the grave of the one just man. Irresistible logic, then, condemns both men to death; and accordingly they pull one another over a precipice. Ignorant of what has happened, the woman passes across the scene, answering the call of her child. In the child you see the only hope for her future life.

It will be observed that in *Le Dédale*, as in all his plays, M. Hervieu's method is that of the logician. And, like the Living Skeleton, he is "proud of the title." Replying to M. Binet's questions<sup>1</sup> as to his mental processes in play-writing, he says: "The indispensable quality, as it seems to me, is logic . . . to be quite sure where you are going . . . to see that your conclusion follows from your premises." And he gives an illustration from *Le Dédale*. The child of Paulette, Marianne's frivolous cousin, is stricken by the same malady as Marianne's.

"I was two days hesitating whether Paulette's child ought to die or to survive. The child dead, the mother in black . . . an ugly black dress . . . it will be painful, disagreeable . . . the child alive, she will appear in a pink hat. . . . But, the child dead, there was the means of regenerating Paulette's character. Also a winding up of the subsidiary intrigue, the principal intrigue having to be continued without Paulette. . . . Logic triumphed over the fear of risking the success of the play by sombreness."

But what distinguishes this play of M. Hervieu's from the others is that its logic is never obtrusive; closely reasoned out though it is, step by step, its strongest appeal is always an appeal to the emotions. In the scenes between mother and daughter the case of religious convictions *versus* common sense is argued out for all it is worth; but what is chiefly brought home to us is the anguish of a breach between mother and daughter, both good women. Paulette's child dies from logical necessity, as we have just seen; but what concerns the spectator of the play is the agony of Paulette's grief.

<sup>1</sup> *L'Année Psychologique*, tome x.

Though Marianne falls into Max's arms to illustrate M. Hervieu's thesis, what affects us is the swift inevitability with which the "circuit" of passion between the two is "completed." And when Max and Guillaume go over the precipice, while we know that it is the process of reasoning by "exhaustion" which dictates their fate, we are none the less shaken by the horror of it, none the less thrilled by the little piping treble of the child's call to its mother at the next moment. Best of all, the play has the true tragic dignity. Its whole fabric is reared upon a physiological fact—or assumption; its chief scene turns upon a *surprise des sens*; it might easily have been coarse, ignoble, even repulsive. It might have been, but never is; so tactfully has the subject been handled, with restraint so perfect, with so fastidious a taste. Beyond cavil *Le Dédale* confers upon M. Hervieu the primacy of the contemporary French stage.

If M. Hervieu is a dramatic artist, working in the region of ideas, M. Brieux is an ideologue, for whom dramatic art is only an instrument of propagandism. Indignation, on very old authority, "makes verses"; with M. Brieux it also makes plays. He desires to awaken the collective conscience; his plays are fierce exposures of social abuses, injustices, impostures. In *L'Évasion* he denounced the tyranny of medical pseudo-science, in *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont* he handled the "woman question," in *Blanchette* he exhibited the evils of educating people beyond their station, and in *Les Bienfaiteurs* his moral was "O Charity, what crimes are committed in thy name!" One of his latest plays, *Maternité*, deals with the population question. It is, as everybody knows, a burning question in France, where the birth-rate is, or until the other day was, steadily decreasing. A senator,

M. Piot, has founded a League for the encouragement of large families. Thereupon it occurs to M. Brieux to play the part of devil's advocate by marshalling the various cases in which births are not a blessing but a curse—as, *e.g.*, when they are illegitimate or when there are no means to maintain the offspring. As generally happens with M. Brieux, his play is a series of variations on a single theme; his personages are not so much human beings as the helpless puppets of his *idée fixe*; his plot is a mere revolving platform designed to bring each aspect of the one subject in turn under the eye of the spectator. The Sub-Prefect Brignac zealously distributes the Ministerial circular on the duty of all good citizens to repopulate the country. He admires its style, and reads it aloud to the Mayor and the Commandant of the Garrison and Mme. Brignac. Madame does not share her husband's enthusiasm; perpetual child-bearing has brought her to the condition of a slave. There is another sense, as the Sub-Prefect soon finds, in which maternity, like charity, begins at home. His wife's young sister Annette has a shameful confession to make. She has been betrayed and abandoned. Appeal to her seducer's family—promptly made by Mme. Brignac—is fruitless, for Annette is *sans dot*. Then the Sub-Prefect forgets all his fine phrases about maternity and turns Annette out of doors. There are establishments, says he, for such cases as hers where no questions are asked and no names divulged. In such an establishment Annette dies from an illegal operation, and the play concludes in an Assize Court where the *sage-femme* is brought to trial, together with some of her customers—unlike poor Annette, married, but too poor to rear children. The judge

bullies everybody, the counsel hurl insults at one another, Mme. Brignac, called as a witness for the prosecution, goes into hysterics, and the curtain comes down on a scene of ignominy and confusion. Nearly all the matters which M. Brieux here discusses with emphatic frankness would in England rank among the *tacenda*. They are matters for the legislator and the physician, and M. Brieux's play affords no evidence that they gain anything by being treated in the theatre. *Maternité* shocks our feelings without contributing any solution of the difficulties attending the question at issue. It merely leaves the spectator in a mood of what Dr. Johnson called "inspissated gloom." Art that merely depresses—Aristotle long ago laid down a canon about that—is bad art. And *Maternité* is not even good propagandism.

It is a relief, if only a slight relief, to turn to another play of ideas, *L'Oasis*, by M. Jean Jullien. This curious work preaches the religion of humanity in a vein of optimistic idealism and with a deluge of rhetoric. Its Eastern atmosphere revives one of the classic literary traditions of the eighteenth century, a tradition that assigned to Persians and to Chinese virtuous sentiments calculated to put our Western civilisation to shame. Somewhere in the desert the children of Islam have sought refuge from the European invader. The chief, Mohamed ben Moktar, having captured a Catholic nun, marries her by force (the incident was less revolting as presented at the *Œuvre* Theatre than might have been feared), and carries her off to an oasis, where he proposes to live for climate and the affections and the "higher life." It is to be a humanitarian oasis, where everybody is to be as happy as the day is long, uttering

sententious platitudes like the people in *Rasselas*. But this Utopian community, oasis and all, is captured by the "Europeans"—dressed in the uniform of the French colonial army—who burn and slay in the interests of "civilisation." European civilisation is made to look the poor thing that M. Jullien evidently thinks it when Mohamed's wife, the ex-nun, declines to return to Christianity and vows that she never, never will desert Mr. Micawber—I should say, Mohamed ben Moktar. Ultimately Mohamed and his wife are allowed to retire to another oasis, where they found a second Utopian community, and this time are left in peace. There is some effective satire on European methods of "civilising" what it considers "inferior" races, but the play is drowned in verbiage and cloyed with a rather namby-pamby sentimentalism, and the total impression is of something slightly absurd. Such ideas as it deals in might fitly have been expressed in a *conte moral*, just as the ideas of M. Brieux's play might fitly have been expressed in a medico-legal treatise. It is significant of the paramount importance of the theatre in France that it tends to become a Universal Provider and to impress all ideas, all questions, into its service, even those unsuited to its purpose.

It is the national system of conscription transferred to the world of art. Every Frenchman must serve in the army, and every French author must be enlisted for the theatre. Another "pressed man" is M. Anatole France. It is a great pity. M. France's genius and method are everything but theatrical. It is not in his way to construct a "story," in the novelist's sense, far less a play-plot. He deals not in action, but in contemplation. His gentle irony, his

air of perpetual negation, his subdivisions of the infinitely little in thought and feeling, his Shandean humour, the fastidious charm of his style, and everything that is his—what have they to do with the hard, emphatic, garish art of the theatre? And yet he has been induced in an evil hour to bring his other self, M. Bergeret, before the footlights. It is the M. Bergeret of *Le Mannequin d'Osier*, the M. Bergeret of the conjugal misadventure, the M. Bergeret who was so distressingly interrupted in the composition of his *Virgilius Nauticus* by the plaints of the servant girl Euphémie. Of course the inevitable happens. What the play succeeds in rendering is just that part of the book which is devoid of significance and passes almost unobserved by the reader—the mere external incidents, incidents of no account apart from the comments for which they are the pretext. What the play does not and cannot render is the quintessence of Bergeret, the strange blend in him of ordinary human weaknesses and what he would call philosophic “ataraxy.” Take the “adventure” of the faithless Mme. Bergeret and M. Roux. In the book the brutality of the incident only serves as a foil to Bergeret’s queer reception of it—the obsession of a physical picture amid the details of notes on etymology, the anguish of a deceived husband tempered by the reflection that M. Roux is a good Latinist. On the stage, while the brutal element is necessarily softened into something comparatively decent and at the same time commonplace, not so much as a hint can be given of M. Bergeret’s quaint mental state. And all the proportions, all the “values,” as the painters would say, are spoiled. In the book Mme. Bergeret is merely dull and mean and small; raised to theatre-pitch she

acquires all the dignity of a "protagonist." Bergeret himself, a will-less person in the book, has to have a will and to take action, since will and action are indispensable to a stage-character. Further, the story has to be padded out with stupid stuff about the "engagement" of one of Bergeret's daughters, while our ecclesiastical friends of the book, the Abbé Guitret and the Abbé Lantaigne, are reduced to the ranks of "supers." And so M. France has been butchered, or rather has immolated himself, in order that M. Guitry of the Renaissance may show how cleverly he can "make up" as M. Bergeret! To all good Anatolians the affair must have been deplorable. Probably there would have been no such affair to deplore had it not been for M. Guitry's earlier success in his adaptation of M. France's pathetic little story *Crainquebille*. But that was, in more senses than one, another story. The misfortunes of the old costermonger have no kinship with the psychological subtleties, the complicated *vie intérieure*, of a Bergeret; on the stage a sequence of simple scenes, just as in the book a bare recital of a few external facts, serves to bring out the full pathos of them. Moreover, old Crainquebille is not a great classic type like Bergeret, of whom multitudes of readers have formed their own cherished image and are sure to resent another image thrust upon them by this or that actor. There is something indecent in the spectacle of a stage-player pretending to be Mr. Pickwick or Mr. Pecksniff, Major Dobbin or Captain Costigan, Mr. Elton or Mr. Collins; one feels that a gross liberty has been taken with one's most intimate friend. M. Bergeret belongs to that sacrosanct body.

There is, however, just one feature in this stage version of *Le Mannequin d'Osier* which relates its

intention, if not its actual accomplishment, to a venerable tradition of the French Theatre. Its main interest is an interest of character. It is primarily an answer to the question, not What happened in the Bergeret household? but What sort of a man is Bergeret? No doubt there is a sense in which Aristotle's assertion that plot is more important than character must always remain true. But it is only true in a very limited sense of the comedy of character, a dramatic *genre* virtually unknown to Aristotle (who, for that matter, made his assertion about tragedy); and it counts for next to nothing in the comedy of "static" character. Such a comedy is *Les Affaires sont les Affaires*, by M. Octave Mirabeau. By a "static" character I mean one that is a fixed quantity in the play; essentially the same force in magnitude and direction from the rise to the fall of the curtain. It does not move; it is we who are taken all round it, so that we may see its various facets. It is not moulded by the successive incidents of the play, but only disclosed by them; *sibi constat*. This "static" treatment is familiar enough in universal drama, from Plautus to Ben Jonson; but it has perhaps been practised most continuously and successfully in France ever since Molière drew his "miser" and his "vale-tudinarian." M. Mirabeau's "static" character, Isidore Lechat, is the born virtuoso in the art of money-making, the ferocious egoist who lives for the main chance, who is in the cant phrase a "Napoleon of finance." And, like Napoleon, he is non-moral, a natural force, like gravity or heat. Just as this is one of the most familiar types in the actual world, so it is one of the stock figures of novel and drama. In *John Gabriel Borkman* Ibsen gave the type a touch of the

grandiose by a quasi-poetic treatment. M. Mirabeau, too, sees that in any great force, even a force that makes for evil, there is an aspect of grandeur. A colossal egoist is, at any rate, colossal. The colossal egoist Lechat compels admiration by his devout self-worship, his expansive geniality, his sheer delight in the exercise of his own ruthless force. He is odiously vulgar, thick-skinned, and conscienceless, but almost captivating by virtue of his buoyancy, indomitable courage, and gigantic strength. He is a Nietzschean who has never heard the name of Nietzsche. For three out of four acts M. Mirabeau exhibits this character exclusively by the "static" method, "sampling" it as it were at all points, showing you the millionaire—for of course Lechat is a millionaire—as host, as parent, as bargainer, and so forth. Then comes a final act of tragic catastrophe, when the millionaire, in the supreme moment of his triumph, is stricken down by the sudden death of his son, the only creature, next to himself, that he loves in the world. For sheer brute vitality this character of Lechat is one of the most notable achievements of the contemporary French stage.

It was magnificently acted at the Théâtre Français by M. de Féraudy, who, not long afterwards, again distinguished himself by his performance of a very different part in M. Marcel Prévost's comedy, *La Plus Faible*. What a contrast to Isidore Lechat this Louis Gourd, grotesquely ugly, painfully timid, hopelessly inarticulate, craving for a woman's love but without any of the showy qualities by which a woman's love is too often won! There comes a moment when he confronts a rival endowed with those showy qualities, and proves himself the better man of the two—Dobbin, say, asserting himself for once and making George

Osborne look small—and that is the moment in which M. de Féraudy almost persuades you that M. Marcel Prévost has written a play of sterling worth. But one good moment does not make a play, and in fact M. Prévost's comedy is only a conventional exercise in story-telling over which there is no profit in lingering. It deals with a subject sufficiently time-worn—the struggle between passion which seeks to be free and the prejudices, interests, and ordinances of the social and family environment. Incidentally the point is urged that an irregular union, however "distinguished," however deliberately entered upon by two advanced "intellectuals" as a protest against orthodox marriage, is in the long run a less convenient and on the whole less rational arrangement than the institution against which it is a protest. These, to be sure, are "ideas"—there are ideas, as M. Hervieu has pointed out, underlying every play—but *La Plus Faible*, for all that, is not entitled to rank as a play of ideas. Its ideas are merely a pretext for its story, and as the story, in one form or another, has often been told before, and as it is not very strikingly told now, one need say no more about it.

Paris is seldom without a "success of scandal," and a specimen of this disagreeable class is *Le Retour de Jérusalem*, by M. Maurice Donnay. Much excellent work stands to M. Donnay's credit in the past—artistically excellent work, be it understood, for the ethical quality of such plays as *Amants* and *La Douloureuse* is quite another matter—but this Anti-Semitic exploit of his cannot but have disappointed and disconcerted his more judicious admirers. Exploitation, perhaps, would be a fitter word, did the English language permit its use; for M. Donnay has

deliberately chosen to make capital out of a racial prejudice and to flatter the baser instincts of the Boulevard mob. Stripped of its Anti-Semitism, *Le Retour de Jérusalem* would offer little that is distinguishable from the orthodox elements of an elopement drama. A. (with a placid wife, whom he despises) "bolts" with B. (wedded to a man whom she detests). Then the new couple find in time that they too are unsuited for each other, and they part, with hearty expressions of mutual dis-esteem. This is one of the patterns which every theatrical emporium always keeps in stock, and, accordingly, to give it a specious air of novelty M. Donnay tacks on to this old framework an assortment of the caricatures by which an outwitted, outpaced, and outbidden society seeks to take its revenge on the modern Jew. He makes A. a French aristocrat and B. a Jewish "intellectual" ("une sale Juive" is the less complimentary description of A.'s wife Suzanne), who is seen gradually disenchanting and finally revolting A. by exhibiting the supposed characteristics of her race. She exhibits them in the garish colours of her costumes, in her "practical" instincts, and, worst of all, in the composition of her *salon*. Here we meet with the "pushful" Jew, and the cosmopolitan Jew (a gross caricature of Dr. Max Nordau), and the Jew who reviles the army, and the Jew who wants to know what on earth people mean by "patrie." A., after defining "patrie" in a tirade which sends every Chauvinist amongst the audience into an apoplexy of delight, turns B.'s Jewish friends out of the house, and the *ménage* comes to an abrupt end. Then A. would like to be reconciled to his wife Suzanne, but she, too, has had enough of him, and so everybody lives unhappy ever afterwards. I said that

the formula of the play was a stale one, but perhaps an exception has to be made in favour of the conclusion which concludes nothing. For there we have a distinct departure from the old, or Dumasian, practice, which would certainly have brought down the curtain upon a pistol-shot or some other violent catastrophe —such a catastrophe, for instance, as terminates *Antoinette Sabrier*, by M. Romain Coolus. Here, again, you have a dissatisfied wife who seeks "consolation" in an elopement; or would seek it, were not the plan frustrated at the critical moment by the ruin of the lady's husband. To run away from a bankrupt husband is apparently a breach of the theatrical point of honour. Unfortunately things have gone too far to be successfully concealed, and the husband, under the shock of the truth, blows out his brains. The treatment of this play, however, is neither so *banal* nor so brutal as its plot. M. Coolus writes with sobriety and distinction, and the capital scene of the play, in which an unforeseen but entirely natural accident makes all things only too plain to the husband, reveals the true "fingering of the dramatist." Once more, in *L'Adversaire*, by MM. Alfred Capus and Emmanuel Arène, the Parisian playgoer has been offered his favourite "thrill," the detection of a wife's infidelity by the pertinacious questionings of a husband, and, as in M. Donnay's case, there is to be noted a revolt against the Dumasian *dénouement*. A Dumasian husband would have fought the lover; but this one has the sense to see that a duel would prove nothing and settle nothing. He sees also that his wife, despite her infidelity, still loves him, as he still loves her. Shall, then, bygones be bygones? No, for though you may forgive, you cannot by effort of the will forget. The

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only sensible course is for the husband and wife to remain apart. No doubt that is the true ending, viewed in the cold light of reason; but Joe Gargery would say that it "do not overstimulate" the spectator in search of an evening's amusement. It is only right to add that M. Capus is as a rule the most joyous of playwrights. Londoners have had the opportunity of seeing three of his most characteristic performances, *La Veine*, *Les Deux Écoles*, and *La Bourse ou La Vie*, plays with a morality which may be charitably called "easy" and a sense of the *joie de vivre* which may not uncharitably be called exorbitant. I confess to preferring M. Capus the madcap "amuser" of these plays to M. Capus the austere moralist of *L'Adversaire*. For his fun, if not very straitlaced, is always good-humoured; his great success—he is the most popular playwright in France at the present day—may be taken to mark the complete and final rout of that morbid product of a few years ago, the deliberately and callously offensive play, the *genre rosse*.

It will have been seen that the French theatre, on the whole, is still able to show a continuous and an abundant supply of plays really alive. What a painful contrast confronts us in the English theatre—anæmia, sluggish circulation, a general condition of depressed vitality! Our stage is languishing for lack of fresh blood and fresh air. We have a handful of accomplished playwrights with commonplace ideas or no ideas at all, and we have one or two men with ideas, but only an imperfect mastery of dramatic resources. The unidea'd experts seem to have grown of late a little tired, and have communicated part of their fatigue to their audiences, while the comparatively unskilled men of ideas either enjoy public fame by a

very precarious tenure or have altogether to dispense with it. There are, to be sure, some adroit purveyors of light "digestive" entertainments—plays which have their interest from the point of view of box-office receipts, but which it would be absurd to reckon as substantial assets in any other than a commercial estimate of our theatrical possessions. This is a meagre display. We are occasionally reminded that, bad as things are to-day, they were worse only a few years ago, in the period, say, immediately preceding that lively time when Mr. Pinero dazzled the town with *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, and Mr. Jones announced what he was pleased to call "The Renaissance" of the English Drama. That is true, but not exactly consoling. For it comes to this, that the brisk movement of the nineties has left us in a condition only a degree less stagnant than that of the eighties. Our stage needs a current of fresh ideas, a spirit of eager and audacious experimentation; even a little reckless iconoclasm would do no harm.

For its fresh ideas it is at present almost entirely dependent on two men, Mr. Barrie and Mr. Bernard Shaw. Not that Mr. Barrie is an ideologue. He has no foible for intellectual gymnastic. Such philosophy as he has to offer is by no means profound. His ideas and his philosophy are only interesting because they are his; because they go with his other qualities, his fancy and whim and tenderness, to make up a character of rare charm. For we must not be duped by the cant about the "impersonality" of drama. Like any other art, drama is in the last analysis a revelation of the artist, and Barrie's plays charm us because we are aware of a lovable nature at the back of them. His most felicitous thing, so far, is *The*

*Admirable Crichton*, a Voltairean *conte philosophique*, told, however, with a simple kindness of tone which suggests anyone in the world rather than Voltaire. It showed how a very slight modification of the material conditions of life will at once upset all the "values" of the social hierarchy and turn the *personnel* of a fashionable West-End mansion topsy-turvy. Transferred from Mayfair to a desert island, the butler becomes King and the Earl a slave. In "natural" conditions it is only "natural" capacity that tells. So overwhelming is its advantage that the butler-King is in danger of developing into a despot; but the arrival of a rescue party from a man-of war at once restores the artificial standards of "civilisation," and

".... tout rentre ici dans l'ordre accoutumé."

Back again in Mayfair, the born ruler of men becomes once more the butler, quite content with the prospect of retirement to a snug little public-house in the Harrow Road. The logical circle is complete. Notable as the dialogue was for its rippling flow of good-humoured gaiety, the play disclosed something more notable still in its use of that pantomime which, at the right moment, is far more significant than speech. It is just there that the true dramatic instinct reveals itself, in the practical application of the principle that what is shown counts on the stage for much more than what is said. For evidence of Mr. Barrie's dramatic instinct one need only mention two scenes of pantomime: that wherein the party who have revolted from Crichton's leadership slink back silent and subdued, drawn by the sheer force of hunger to the stew he is preparing, and that of the sudden arrest of the dance at the booming of the ship's gun. In each of these

scenes not a word was uttered ; it was the action that "spoke volumes." A slighter effort of Mr. Barrie's, *Quality Street*, had the delicate fragrance of Jane Austen, whose period it recalled. Even slighter was *Little Mary*, a prank rather than a play, flimsy in texture, with something of the facile cleverness of an improvisation, but redeemed by the humour of its episodic scenes and by a character of exquisite pathos —one of those tender little maidens with a gift for "mothering" whom Mr. Barrie has more than once portrayed.

What is the quintessence of Mr. Barrie's charm ? Kindliness, perhaps ; a pervading, but never cloying, sweetness of nature. With this supreme quality goes an unfailing freshness of observation. For Mr. Barrie is a close and patient observer. Thus he is perpetually annexing new corners of life for stage use, tapping new sources of theatrical supply. This faculty of minute and accurate observation is as rare as it is valuable. It is, so far as one can tell, almost entirely lacking in Mr. Bernard Shaw, and there perhaps is the ultimate reason why this original thinker and brilliant writer stops just a little short of complete success in his stage work. One has to put it conjecturally, for Mr. Shaw's case is a little puzzling. You recognise, with the joy of a collector in a new curio, the unique personality revealed in his plays. They delight most of us, with reservations, when acted, and without reservation when read. You revel in their waywardness, their unexpectedness, their audacious self-confidence, not to say self-worship. They wake up a somnolent world and set it furiously thinking. It is possible to hold that he not seldom talks nonsense and at the same time to have a sneaking affection for his nonsense as more

diverting and stimulating than other men's sense. But I am dealing here with the art of drama and the effective forces of the stage, and the fact is not to be ignored that, with all one's delight over Mr. Shaw's plays, there remains in the mind a vague sense of balked expectation, a feeling that there is a screw loose somewhere.

In the familiar phrase, the plays do not exactly "come off." Is the real secret of this what I have suggested—Mr. Shaw's lack of observation? Close observers of human nature are so because they love it, because they are keenly interested in what men and women are like. The facts of life fascinate them as facts—"theirs not to reason why." Evidently that is not Mr. Shaw's nature. He takes little, if any, pleasure in the mere contemplation of the *comédie humaine* and the registration of its minute peculiarities. His pleasure only begins with the reasoning why. He recalls a certain brilliant talker, described by R. L. Stevenson, who was perpetually interrupting his interlocutor with "Wait a moment, I should have a theory for that." The only difference is that Mr. Shaw never needs this moment's grace; his theory arrives with the fact, and sometimes precedes it. The ordinary everyday surface of the universe is to him only a spring-board from which he jumps into the space of ratiocination—his own peculiar space, a space of four dimensions. This is not the frame of mind for seeing facts clearly and reporting them faithfully. Whatever other qualities a dramatist may require, he must have something in him of the painter, must desire to reproduce what he sees, just as it is, merely because it is a pleasure to him to see it as it is. But Mr. Shaw is never in love with the thing as it is; he is in love with his own thoughts about it.

How, for that matter, can he love the thing when his thoughts have a perpetual tendency to tell him that it is a wrong thing? Most of the facts of human nature seem to Mr. Shaw to be egregious blunders. Our ideals are wrong, our conduct is irrational, we "found our institutions on the ideals suggested to our imagination by our half-satisfied passions," instead of on a genuinely scientific natural history. The right theory of life and conduct, which its author is fond of calling Shawism or the "Shavian philosophy," is revealed to us in Mr. Shaw's plays. Apparently this philosophy, though it is not without its obligations to Schopenhauer and Ibsen and Nietzsche, is mainly of Mr. Shaw's own invention. But one need not discuss it here, for it does not affect the question of Mr. Shaw's dramaturgic quality. Before one can consider its philosophic content, a play must give the illusion of life, and to put it most favourably, in Mr. Shaw's plays that illusion is intermittent. If, for example, you take *Candida*, one of the best of Mr. Shaw's plays, written a few years ago, but only recently performed in London, you get the illusion of life from some of the characters and some parts of the action, but not from all the characters or from the action as a whole. The young wife of a hard-working East End clergyman finds that her husband's religious activity and zeal for good works do not help her to live her own life. (Every young wife who has seen Nora in *A Doll's House* must now live her own life.) A boyish poet woos her, offers her the large and liberal life of romance, all rhapsody and colour—a love, in short, that shall be richer than her present mere sentimentalisation of conjugal duty. In the end Candida decides in favour of the prosaic life, and remains with her husband. She

arrives at this conclusion by a strict process of ratiocination, summoning parson and poet to her presence, weighing their respective claims upon her affections, and finally opting for the parson, not because he is her husband, but because he needs her most. Of these three characters, Candida is real—the sensible, helpful "managing" woman that everybody knows—and so is the parson; but the poet seems a mere patchwork from biographies of Shelley, a walking symbol of the poetic temperament. The glaring unreality, however, of the play is its *dénouement*, with its preposterous assumption that such a choice as Candida's is to be made by reason instead of by feeling. In real life the sole question (our conventional morality as to the obligation of marriage vows being *ex hypothesi* ruled out) would be, Which of the two men does the woman love? Passion, not ratiocination, would decide it. But Mr. Shaw seems wholly incapable of representing passion. He thinks the world and the stage make too much of it already; he reproves it severely in more than one of his prefaces. In that case, he ought to avoid dramatic situations which are essentially situations of passion; to drain them of their passion and then fill them with the workings of the pure intellect deprives them of all resemblance to life. The fact is, a writer who represents men and women carrying on their lives by the light of reason is offering us a world as fantastic as anything imagined by Swift or M. Jules Verne or Mr. H. G. Wells. A "scientific natural history" that leaves out of account our subconscious states, our animal appetites, the unchastened will-to-live, all the blind forces of which human action is the resultant, strikes one as a fearful kind of wild-fowl. Of the existence and potency

of these brute natural forces Mr. Shaw must of course be as well aware as anyone else; only they do not happen to fit in with his dramatic method. He has tried to represent one of them in his *Man and Superman*, and has signally failed. This work is Mr. Shaw's response to a casual suggestion that he should write a Don Juan drama. Nowadays, says Mr. Shaw, the relations of Don Juan and his victims are reversed. It is woman who pursues, man who is her prey. Nature, working out her own ends, has contrived (it is the familiar theory of Schopenhauer) that man, with all his boasted superiority, shall be the helpless fly caught in the web of the spider—woman. And lo! in illustrating this theory Mr. Shaw gives us a heroine who has not a particle of womanly attraction. It is true that her weak victim is constantly declaring himself subjugated, constantly crying out in affright that he is caught in the toils; but we feel all the time that he only does so because Mr. Shaw's thesis requires it. To give dramatic existence and force to the typical woman of Mr. Shaw's case you must be able to paint passion, the obscurer instincts and emotions of sex, and that is just what Mr. Shaw always fails to do. Of course, the play is full of good things—Mr. Shaw could not be dull if he tried—though its very best thing, an ironic dialogue in Hades presenting a new analysis of Old Nick, can hardly be said to belong to the play, but to be tacked on to it from outside.

When all is said, however, it remains true that for sheer energy and fineness of brain, as well as for pioneering quality—the spirit which attacks fresh problems and carries the drama into unexplored regions—we have no one on the English stage comparable to Mr. Shaw. Our drama needs pioneers even more

than expert dramatists. And it is for that reason that we all ought to welcome such experiments as Mrs. Alfred Lyttelton's *Warp and Woof*, which was doubtless weak from the point of view of technical skill, but which did attempt to deal with an actual question of social economics. How far Mrs. Lyttelton's picture *à la* Brieux of overworked sempstresses, rapacious and bullying employers, hoodwinked factory inspectors, and selfish lady customers was justified by the facts, is a debatable point. The play may not have been a first-rate example of its species, but it is something to have a play of this species written at all. The smallest contribution to our existing stock of dramatic themes should be thankfully received.

Meanwhile the great theme of drama is still the duel of sex. Our dramatists cannot keep their hands off that, though they know well enough, in face of average English feeling on the subject, the risk they run of burning their fingers. It is not only that many people object to the way in which the drama discusses questions of "free" love, seduction, adultery, and divorce; they would like the drama, if that were possible, to ignore such subjects altogether. There is the Puritan strain in us to be reckoned with. There are still numerous classes of Englishmen for whom the theatre is a place of perdition. Writing in his diary on his twenty-third birthday Mr. Gladstone classed the theatre with the racecourse as sinful; he subsequently changed his opinion, but the entry is significant, representing as it does the extreme view held by many of Mr. Gladstone's countrymen to-day. Even among playgoers there is often to be found a prejudice against the treatment of sexual questions in the theatre. They are held to be too serious for consideration in a place which, whatever

else it may be, is essentially a place of amusement. It would be only natural if this disposition in the public were to intimidate our dramatists, were to tempt them to tamper with their artistic conscience by Bowdlerizing life instead of unflinchingly representing things as they are.

We all know that this is what occurs when the more frivolous French pieces are adapted into English: lovers become lawful husbands, and guilty intrigues are softened into foolish flirtations; in brief, to put it figuratively, trousers are fitted to the legs of the piano. Such plays are mere merchandise and must be accommodated to their market. But with plays having serious pretensions to art the case is very different. No doubt their atmosphere or their incidents may legitimately be modified to suit the public taste or even an individual caprice. We now know that Victor Hugo's *Marion de Lorme* was originally a mere piece of historical description, and only became a thesis-play, demonstrating the possible regeneration of a courtesan, by reason of a change of *dénouement*, demanded by an actress two years after the completion of the play in its first form. M. Hervieu's *L'Énigme*, played in London as *Cæsar's Wife*, was originally intended to maintain the doubt as to the identity of the guilty woman up to the fall of the curtain; the author was induced to resolve the doubt by representations that the public would be irritated by being left in the dark. In deference to the popular demand for happy endings, Mr. Pinero radically altered the conclusion of *The Profligate*. But what it is certainly not legitimate for a serious dramatist to accommodate to any demand save his own is his moral attitude, the lesson and "message" of his play. For

his artistic integrity is involved in that; it is his criticism of life, part and parcel of the man himself. The proper name for compromise in this quarter is hypocrisy.

Now it would be quite unjustifiable to suggest that Mr. Pinero descends to any such compromise as this. I do not, of course, know the workings of his mind, and have no ground for supposing that his plays do not represent his genuine convictions. One is bound to credit him with absolute sincerity. Unhappily, this means that one is also bound to credit him with a certain Philistinism of thought, a certain complacency of agreement with conventional British ideals. One is bound to credit him, for instance, with a real belief in the "whitewashing" process under clerical supervision with which he concludes the adventures of Agnes Ebbsmith and of the woman in *The Benefit of the Doubt*. One is bound to credit him with the assumption that the best way of demonstrating the virtue of humdrum domesticity and the viciousness of romantic amours is to write a play like *Letty*. A shop-girl hesitates between two courses: lawful marriage with an intolerable rowdy of her own social rank and "guilty splendour" with a fine gentleman who loves her. The odious vulgarity of the would-be husband nearly drives her into the arms of the would-be seducer, and she is only saved by an accident. In the end she chooses neither of these men, but a commonplace little photographer, with whom she settles down in smug suburban respectability, while the aristocratic Don Juan is condemned to die of consumption. It is, to be sure, a conclusion of unexceptionable morality, but was it worth while writing such a play for that particular thesis? It is

the thesis, you may say, of *Madame Bovary*, and with Emma Bovary it was not virtue but vice that triumphed ; yet Flaubert contrived to be far more "moral" with his tragic catastrophe than Mr. Pinero with his lawfully begotten baby in the photographer's parlour. You are sure that Mr. Pinero feels convinced of the propriety of Letty's choice ; but it is unfortunate that he contrives so to present it as to leave you with a dominant impression of its tame and slightly ludicrous commonplace. You admire his dramaturgic skill. The scene of the "bounder's" supper party, the scene of the frustrated seduction, were little masterpieces. But even on the technical side you are not wholly satisfied. Mr. Pinero writes badly, for he makes his characters "talk like a book." That is to say, he does not seem to grasp the difference between language intended to be read and language intended to be spoken. In the printed page all language has to be raised to a higher pitch than natural talk, for it has to do without the life and colour imparted to it by the human voice and personality. But on the stage the human voice and personality are restored to it, so that "book" language in a play at once offends the ear ; it is pitched too high. This fault seems to have grown on Mr. Pinero ; both Letty and her Don Juan indulge in a remarkably pompous lingo.

As for Mr. Jones, he has once more been playing round the precincts of the Divorce Court. But, as usual, he manages to keep his characters out of the box. In *Joseph Entangled*, as in several other plays of his, we have the couple who *almost* elope, the home which is *almost* broken up, so that morality is technically safeguarded. Only technically, however, for we have the same fun as though it had been infringed,

the joy of the illicit, the winks and nods and allusions. Joseph is entangled, through a piece of sheer stupidity, with a married lady; and all their friends believe it to be an "entanglement" in the baser sense of the word. The innocent pair cannot convince the world of their innocence. Nobody believes in the lady's virtue, least of all her own husband. Ultimately her character is cleared by the ancient device of eavesdropping behind a curtain. It was on the whole an amusing comedy, of the same class as *The Liars*, if an inferior specimen of that class: cynical, worldly, leaving a slightly bitter taste in the mouth—but amusing. If we cannot have the theatre of ideas, we must put up with the theatre of amusement. Fortunate Parisians, who have both!

*October 1904.*

## THE MODERNITY OF THE *POETICS*

IT is long since the learned world abandoned the habit of darkening counsel by citations from the "master of them that know." When L'Intimé in *Les Plaideurs* appealed to the authority of Aristotle in a case of fowl-stealing he was answered by Dandin :—

“Avocat, il s’agit d’un chapon  
Et non point d’Aristote et de sa ‘Politique,’”

and that reply is nowadays held conclusive of the matter. Yet there are some few people who think that the reaction, as is usual with reactions, has gone too far; and to these at any rate it will be a pleasure to find a writer so vigorous and (in the best sense) so mundane as Mr. Herbert Paul saying a good word for Aristotle. Mr. Paul, discoursing of *Art and Eccentricity*,<sup>1</sup> declares that in many questions of modern criticism "il s'agit" still of Aristotle—not, indeed, of his *Politics* (though there are many neat "tips" even about literary criticism in that discursive work), but of his *Poetics*. It is with the proposition concerning the function of the poet—"not to tell us what actually happened, but what might happen, and what is possible according to likelihood and necessity"—that Mr. Paul chiefly deals, and he has some excellent remarks to make about the difference between scientific and

<sup>1</sup> *Men and Letters* (1903).  
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artistic truth, verity in life and verisimilitude in fiction. It is true that Aristotle, after being smothered in compliments, is in the end used as stick to beat a dog with—Ibsen and Zola and the *Barrack Room Ballads* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *Sir Richard Calmady* and the Lord Chancellor and every other object of Mr. Paul's dislike which happens to come handy. For he has his prejudices, and sometimes they lead him a pretty dance—as, for example, when he criticises Ibsen's *Ghosts*. “In *Ghosts*, if I remember rightly, a mother makes her son drunk on the stage. That mothers have made their sons drunk cannot, I suppose, be denied. Everything not physically impossible must have happened before now in this most miscellaneous of all possible worlds. But the object of art is not to represent what has happened. It is to represent what may happen in accordance with the law of likelihood or necessity.” Admirably put—only the unfortunate thing is that Mr. Paul's memory has deceived him, so that it really is a case for answering that “il s'agit d'un chapon” and not of Aristotle and his τὰ δυνατὰ κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς η̄ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον. For Mrs. Alving in Ibsen's play does not make Oswald drunk. Indeed, it is difficult to see how a bottle of champagne between three could make any of the party drunk—especially as the drinking even of that “modest quencher” is cut short by an outbreak of fire. Let Mr. Paul stick to Aristotle by all means; but he would do better to leave Ibsen alone.

Nor is this the only case in which he is more successful in expounding an Aristotelian proposition than in applying it. Adverting to Lamb's defence of the Reformation dramatists against Macaulay “on the ground that the life of the stage was a totally different

thing from the life of the world," he says that Lamb was right, because "a play is not a series of interviews"—*i.e.* not a record of what has actually happened, but a picture of what might happen according to likelihood and necessity. But that, surely, was precisely Macaulay's point. He never contended that *The Way of the World* or *The Country Wife* was a transcript of actual fact, but that they were both pictures of fact only too possible and "inevitable" in the eyes of the man in the pit. It was because they fulfilled the Aristotelian law that they were morally dangerous. Lamb's defence was tantamount to saying that they broke the Aristotelian law by being semi-fantastic. Common sense, I think, is still on the side of Macaulay in that little controversy. Again, Mr. Paul dislikes realism in fiction, and says: "The whole of the realistic school flies in the face of Aristotle's maxim. It is enough for them that a thing has happened. Mean, ugly, disgusting, or rare, it becomes thereupon a legitimate element in fiction." This is an amazing account of what is meant by realism in art. What realist can Mr. Paul name who has based the introduction of some abnormal event into fiction on the ground that it was taken from actual life? The novelist who will come most readily to most people's minds for his trick of "lifting" odd events and characters from life into fiction is the novelist who described death by spontaneous combustion, the Dustman's millions and Boythorn's eccentricities; and Dickens was the very opposite of a realist. One had thought that realism meant a stricter observation of life, the vindication of natural law in the artistic world, care that the villain who has swallowed arsenic shall not forthwith die (as he generally does in the

popular melodramas) with every symptom of strychnine-poisoning—in short an exceptional solicitude for that very *εἰκὸς* and that very *ἀναγκαῖον* of Aristotle which Mr. Paul flings at the realists' heads. The poor belaboured realists may be tempted to say that Mr. Paul, quoting their own pet passage of Aristotle against them, is almost as hard to bear as the devil quoting Scripture to his purpose.

Mr. Paul is better at political gibes. Remarking with justice on the obscurity of Aristotle's statement that what is probable but impossible should by the poet be preferred to what is possible but will not be believed, he makes a sly hit. "The latter class," he says, "is intelligible enough. It is possible for the Archbishop of Canterbury to forge a cheque in payment of his debts at cards, or for the Lord Chancellor to treat all his friends unkindly when he has patronage to distribute, and yet nobody would treat these incidents as credible if they were incorporated in a work of fiction. But how can what is impossible be probable?" Well, one very good "shot" at an answer to this question was made a hundred years ago by that comfortable parson and delightful letter-writer the Rev. Thomas Twining, whose notes to the *Poetics* (impious though it be to say it) strike me as sometimes better worth reading than the text itself. "Such a being as Caliban, for example," says Twining, "is impossible. Yet Shakespeare has made the character appear probable, not certainly to reason, but to imagination. Is not the Lovelace of Richardson, in this view, more out of nature, more improbable than the Caliban of Shakespeare? The latter is at least consistent. I can imagine such a monster as Caliban; I never could imagine such a man as Lovelace." In

other words Aristotle is justifying romance. The artist in fiction is entitled to his own standpoint—which he may fix at whatever degree of distance from actual life he chooses. But having once chosen his plane he must keep in that plane, and must observe the law of probability whether he be working in the plane of “impossibility” or of reality. Aristotle’s expression, by the way—*ἀδύνατα εἰκότα*—is not exactly as Mr. Paul puts it, but “probable impossibilities.” This would apply, for instance, to most of the fun of Mr. Gilbert’s Savoy *libretti*. It was impossible for the Duke of Plaza-Toro in *The Gondoliers* to run himself as a syndicate, but the idea is in the Aristotelian sense probable, or, as we should now say, plausible. So it is with Swift’s Liliputians and Brobdingnagians, or the people in *Erewhon*, or those in the astronomical romances of Mr. H. G. Wells. If once their initial impossibility is waived they act “probably” according to the law of their assumed being. They are *ἀδύνατα εἰκότα*. And Aristotle’s point is that they are preferable in fiction to the *δυνατὰ ἀπίθανα*, the incredible possibilities—e.g. Mr. Hall Caine’s Romans or the Englishwomen of Miss Marie Corelli.

Nothing is easier than to give, in this way, modern applications of Aristotelian laws. At the same time, when Mr. Paul says that the *Poetics* are “intensely modern,” he is, one cannot help thinking, the victim of a fallacy. What is meant by saying that an ancient author is “modern”? Surely, that the whirligig of time has brought in his revenges, that the author’s turn has come round again, through some quality of his mind or temper which makes him peculiarly at home in our own day. Thus Montaigne may fairly be

called "modern" in this age of "introspection" and Bashkirtseffism. In the same way some of the little intimate passages in Euripides seem strangely "modern" in this age of "naturalistic" literature. But in no such sense can the word "modern" be applied to Aristotle. It is true that many of his critical propositions are as valid and fresh to-day as they ever were, but they are not more valid to-day than they were in the days of Elizabeth or than they were in the days of *Le Roi Soleil*. They have never ceased to be valid, because they are inherent in the nature of things; it is a case of the eternal verities, not the case of Sir Roger de Coverley's coat which had been in and out of the fashion forty times. Euclid is true to-day, but he is not accurately to be described as "intensely modern." And as a matter of fact what strikes the modern reader of the *Poetics* is not their modernity, as a whole, but their antiquity. Much of the work, and that the part by which perhaps Aristotle set most store, is as dead as Poor Fred in the epitaph. If the exaggerated importance which Aristotle ascribed to plot is not quite dead, it is assuredly moribund, while his rules about the choice of heroes and of catastrophes are so obsolete as to be almost unintelligible to the modern reader. Why must the hero of a tragedy be neither very good nor very bad? Why must his fate be determined by error and not by wickedness? Why ought the culminating fatality of a tragedy to be the work of ignorance and its true nature to be only discovered afterwards? The answers to these questions, of course, are known so soon as the reader has become aware of the "moralistic" trend in Greek criticism, of the difficulty which even the "master of them that know" had in completely differentiating art from

actual life. It is this vein running through the *Poetics* that reduces it so often to a merely "documentary" value. Part of the work, then, must be called dead; you may call the rest of it immortal if you will, but it is an abuse of language to call it modern.

## PROCESSES OF THOUGHT IN PLAYMAKING

IN reviewing the *Life of George Eliot* at the time of publication, Mr. John Morley recalled a discussion in which the novelist took part one day at the Priory in 1877. She spoke of the different methods of imaginative art, saying that she began with moods, thoughts, passions, and then invented the story for their sake, and fitted it to them; whereas Shakespeare picked up a story that struck him, and then proceeded to work in the moods, thoughts, passions as they came to him in the course of meditation on the story. "We hardly need the result," says Mr. Morley, "to convince us that Shakespeare chose the better part." This comment begs a vexed and still obscure question. Shakespeare no doubt chose the better part—for Shakespeare. But it is conceivable also that George Eliot chose the better part for George Eliot. In any case, is it quite correct to say that an author "chooses" his method of invention? Are the first beginnings of imaginative conception directed by the will? Are they, indeed, conscious at all? Do they not rather emerge unbidden from the vague limbo of subconsciousness? Shakespeare picked up a story that struck him; yes, but why did that story strike him at that moment? Because it fell in with some precedent train of thought, harmonised with some pre-existing mood. Even if we accept the theory of "choice," there may be another explanation for Shakespeare's plan of "picking up" a story. For all

we know to the contrary, he may have had a theme for a play in his head and then ransacked the story-books for a narrative to illustrate the theme. For instance, he may quite possibly have been turning over in his mind the dramatic possibilities of a crime perpetrated by a weak man at the instigation of a wife of sterner mould. Then he happens to turn up Holinshed, and says, "Why, here is the very thing I wanted for my play!" Nothing, I fancy, is more difficult than to trace with certainty the genesis of a work of art.

To-day we know what elusive things mental processes are. But two thousand years ago, when a scientific psychology was neither born nor thought of, people were more cocksure; and accordingly you find a very eminent philosopher and critic, whom *Punch* has described as the author of a clever brochure on Dramatic Principles, laying down the law even more positively than Mr. Morley as to what is "the better part" in imaginative composition. For Aristotle was not content with declaring plot to be the principal element of tragedy; he went on to assume that it must be the first in order of invention. In fact, he made this assumption the basis of a series of recipes, set forth in the cut-and-dried manner of a cookery-book. You might either take your story ready-made or construct it for yourself; but in any case you should first sketch its general outline, and then fill in your episodes and amplify in detail. Your plot must be of this or that kind. Your episodes must be so and so. Then followed some items of purely technical instruction. You should *visualise* your action—that is to say, get a mental picture of what we should now call the *mise-en-scène*, so as to avoid material absurdities or impossibilities. Further, you should, while composing, use

gestures appropriate to your several characters. This would help you to feel what they ought to be feeling. And so on, and so on. These precepts would not have satisfied Mr. Crummles. For they were tantamount to saying that young Nickleby ought not to write a play round a real pump. If real pumps and the like were the only things round which it is possible to write plays, there would be no occasion for qualms about this passage in the *Poetics*. But plays may also be written round an idea, a "humour," a character; and very good plays have been so written. Which was conceived first, the plot of *L'Avare* or the character of the protagonist? Which were conceived first, the characters of Mirabell and Millamant and Lady Wishfort or the story (which is no story) of *The Way of the World*? I have taken two instances almost at random; and a moment of reflection over them will suffice to show that Aristotle's generalisation is far too sweeping, and that, while Shakespeare may have been right in his method, George Eliot need not have been wrong in hers.

But there is one class of plays, a peculiarly modern class, about which it is possible to affirm with certainty that the plot does not come first in order of invention—the plays designed to illustrate some idea in the region of morals or society, plays designated specifically "of ideas." It is interesting to see how these plays—so much in dispute just now, so eagerly demanded by some playgoers, so energetically rejected by others—first emerge into the authors' consciousness and gradually take shape there. The worst of it is that the authors themselves can seldom be trusted to tell the truth of the matter. Either they have not the skill—very few people have—to analyse their own mental processes, or they give a fancy sketch in answer to

the misdirected questions of some "interviewer" intent merely upon a piece of picturesque reporting. A really systematic investigation of the subject is rare. You may, however, find this rare thing in an article contributed by M. Binet, Director of the Laboratory of Psychology at the Sorbonne, to Volume X. of *L'Année Psychologique*. The article is a detailed study, the outcome of seven conversations, or rather cross-examinations, of two hours each, of the way in which M. Paul Hervieu thinks out his plays. M. Hervieu has shown himself the most able of all French dramatists in the presentation of general ideas. He calls himself, in the course of one of these conversations with M. Binet, "an organiser of conflicts of ideas, feelings, and passions." A writer of thesis (or, in our cant English phrase, problem) plays he declines to be called. For, says he, all plays, save madcap farce, have a signification which it is permissible to call a "thesis," and the point at which a play of sentimental demonstration or of social bearings begins to be called a thesis-play has always seemed to him "as arbitrarily fixed as the point at which the Boulevard des Capucines becomes the Boulevard des Italiens." He admits that all his personages have a common habit of arguing it out (somebody else has described them as people who are always standing out for their rights), but he points out that they all perform actions as well. Still, he is pre-eminently a logician, and it is interesting to examine the way in which a mind of that type works for the stage. The first thing one notices is the comparative neglect of Aristotle's advice about visualising your play. Evidently M. Hervieu begins by thinking of ideas, not of people or of places. He starts from an abstraction. He has the same disdain for the mere stage-carpentering

instinct as Dumas *fils*, whose intellectual successor he is. He sees in imagination only "the big things, the characteristic attitudes, such as the act of kneeling, or that of bursting into tears." It is as a writer, he says, that he approaches the theatre, seeing in it at the outset only "*du papier à noircir*." Of many, perhaps of most, dramatists the contrary would have to be said. They approach the theatre, not as writers, but virtually as actors; they act within themselves the characters they are inventing. Presumably this was the process which Aristotle had in view when he advised the playwright to reproduce the gestures of his characters. M. Hervieu, it seems, uses no gesture to assist him in composition save the one of clenching the fists, with stiffened arms—characteristically enough, a gesture signifying a general idea, the idea of force. M. Binet makes an acute remark on the style of dramatists who, like M. Hervieu, have nothing of the virtual actor in them. They write, necessarily, without allowing for intonation, so that their phrase, having to be self-sufficient, to do without this musical aid, is more expressive and substantial than the phrase of the "actor" authors; on the other hand, it has the drawback of disdaining the verbal simplicity of passion. M. Binet has there touched both the strength and the weakness of M. Hervieu's style. His phrasing is always compact, nervous, weighty; but it does, perhaps, occasionally smell of the lamp.

M. Binet elicits some particulars as to the prime origin of one or two of M. Hervieu's plays and the process of their invention which bear upon the general question. Thus, originally, *La Loi de l'Homme* was to be a vindication of women's rights, with a woman of the people, a Louise Michel, for protagonist. When

the piece was accepted for the Théâtre Français, the social scale of the characters had to be raised, and the "feminist" questions had to be narrowed down to the social inferiorities of the married woman. Here, then, was a case of plot being adapted to ideas, not ideas to plot. Another play, *La Course du Flambeau*, shows a plot deliberately constructed round an idea—the idea that each generation sacrifices itself to its successor—just as *Le Dédale* has a plot deliberately built round the idea that a woman, divorced or not, remarried or not, always feels herself to belong to the man through whom she first became a mother. On the other hand, *l'Énigme* did not originate in any preoccupation over a moral problem; there was no deliberate resolution to treat this or that subject. It was written in the thick of the Dreyfus scandal, and reflected a mental obsession. Is this person guilty or not guilty? That question had laid hold of M. Hervieu's mind—and the piece is a "projection" of that mood. In not a single one, then, of these important plays do you find that process of beginning with the story, which Mr. Morley calls choosing the better part. The process is George Eliot's process. The conclusion seems to be that, despite Aristotle, despite Mr. Morley, there is no orthodox method of play invention. It all depends on the kind of play—and the kind of playwright.

## LAWS OF CHANGE

PURISTS may make a wry face over a new name in a Drury Lane programme—"melo-farce"—but students of the drama will be more concerned with the fact that a new name, good or bad, had to be invented. It is by no means an isolated circumstance. Our playbills have for some time shown a tendency to burst the old bonds of nomenclature. One dramatist labels his plays "pleasant" and "unpleasant"; another selects the novel epithet "uncomfortable." The truth is, that the old descriptions of "tragedy," "comedy," and "farce" have long since been found unsuitable; plays have run from one category into the other, or have proved, in the existing conditions of language, wholly nondescript. Criticism—always leaning to the conservative side—has girded at the dramatists, as though they were to blame. Even to-day critics will be found objecting that "the author has called his play a comedy, whereas it is obviously a farce," or that "this so-called tragedy is nothing but a melodrama." Such objections are really uncritical; or, at any rate, they are directed to the wrong address, ignoring as they do the patent fact that the growth of names never keeps pace with the growth of things. It is this disparity which accounts for the barbarous neologisms or downright misnomers which disfigure our theatrical programmes. "The ancients are the ancients," said Molière, "and we are the people of

to-day." Polonius's elaborate list of dramatic categories, once exhaustive, is now useless. The terminology of ancient drama will not accurately fit the drama of to-day, and yet there is none other handy; and our more cautious dramatists acknowledge, without meeting, the difficulty when they seek refuge in the vaguely general term "play."

Leaving philologists to squabble about the names, one may, perhaps, more profitably try to discover what one of Ibsen's characters would call "the law of change" in the things themselves. Dangerous though it may be, as a rule, to import the language of one art into the discussion of another, there can be little harm in finding a vital distinction between the "colour" and the "form" of a play. By the "colour" I mean the particular quality of the appeal which the play makes to the spectator's emotions. A play is grave or gay, realistic or fantastic, "pleasant" or "unpleasant," "comfortable" or "uncomfortable"—that is to say, it aims at exciting a particular quality of mood in us; it solicits our laughter or our tears, addresses itself to our sense of recognition or our sense of wonder, soothes us into acquiescence or stimulates us into opposition. In other words, out of the infinity of moods which make up human life it selects a certain set, and this set I call its colour. The various sets—the various "colourschemes"—constitute the several categories of drama. If they are simple schemes—to pursue the figure, let us call them monochromatic—they give the old orthodox categories, tragedy, comedy, melodrama, farce. With the complex schemes—polychromatic schemes, we must call them—we get the modern "mixed" sorts of drama, from the "farcical comedy" of a few years ago down to this "melo-farce" of the

present day. Note that it is the colour, not the form, which marks off the category. The same structural arrangement is common to all classes of play. Whether it be a tragedy or a farce, you must have exposition, "crisis" and "catastrophe."

Why do I insist upon this distinction between colour and form in drama? For this reason; that the two elements have, if I am not mistaken, widely different "laws of change." Speaking generally, you may say that, in dramatic colour, the monochromatic tends to disappear in favour of the polychromatic. Pure tragedy, "high" comedy, unadulterated farce are virtually obsolete. The fact is certain; the explanation is hazardous, and I can only make a shot at it. Pure tragedy, the exclusive appeal to pity and terror, presupposes a certain intellectual *naïveté*, or even downright ignorance. Our modern aim is to understand the causes of calamities and to provide against them, not to attribute them to an inscrutable will before which we are to bow down. When once the world has grown out of a belief in "fate" and "oracles" it has grown out of a perfect relish for the *Œdipus Tyrannus*. Of course, we may make a deliberate effort to throw ourselves back into the old frame of mind; we may still enjoy a *Paolo and Francesca*, but only artificially, as an act of dilettantism. As to "high" comedy, many attempts have been made to account for its disappearance. Hazlitt thought he had found the reason in the drabness of our modern civilisation; the requisite contrasts of social sets and individuals have been worn away. Mr. George Meredith went nearer the mark when he found the enemies of high comedy in the sentimentalists; such comedy was essentially

cruel. *Le Monde où l'on s'ennuie* is often cited as a late species of "high" comedy, but it is largely sentimental; and even that has had no successor. For purely sentimental comedy it may be that there is yet a chance—*Cousin Kate* was an excellent specimen of the class—but sentimental comedy is a "mixed" *genre*, it does not belong to the monochromatic types which I am here considering. Sheer farce has gone, or is rapidly going, because it outrages our modern sense of the realities of life. Whenever a farce is produced, note with what relief the audience fastens upon any passing episode of comedy; a total divorce from life is felt to be intolerable. The polychromatic drama, then, "holds the field." But here, again, there is a law of change, a law within a law. The balance of colours is upset. We are now disposed to laugh just where our forefathers pulled their longest face. Richard III. has become a sort of Funchinello, and Sir Henry Irving played him with a rich vein of humour. Or from quarters wherein our forefathers found only "inspissated gloom" we seek to find light and a touch of the *joie de vivre*. Compare the record of Betterton's or Garrick's Hamlet with our experience of the part as played by Mr. Forbes Robertson. Or else, we find, contrariwise, a grave dignity in what only struck our forefathers as boisterously comic; examples, Shylock and Sir Peter Teazle, Tartuffe and George Dandin. Change is the playgoer's nature; changed ideas of the ludicrous and the pathetic, and to some extent a mere love of change for its own sake—"the swing of the pendulum"—have brought about a complete revolution in the dramatic colour-scheme.

A very different "law of change," I think, will be found in dramatic form. While in colour we have

moved from the simple to the complex, not to say chaotic, in form we are tending to revert to severe simplicity. Your Elizabethan play was encyclopædic, your Restoration comedy was disorderly and shapeless. Where they revelled in a variety of impression, we demand a strict unity. Even the three classic unities may be found satisfied in many a modern play. More often we get our unity in the logical development of a single idea, as in the French *pièces-à-thèse* or in such a play as *The Admirable Crichton*, or else in the reduction of the drama to its critical moment, as in Ibsen's social plays, or again, in the successive exhibition of the several facets of a single character, according to the latest formula illustrated by such pieces as *L'Indiscret* and *Les Affaires sont les Affaires* and, less rigorously, by Mr. Pinero's *Iris*. On the one hand, then, we have an entire rearrangement of the dramatic palette; on the other, a strict attention to dramatic form. It is a piquant combination which promises interesting developments in the near future.

But what about the distant future? Suppose we consider the theatrical prospect of 2270 A.D. In *Sur La Pierre Blanche*, M. Anatole France gives a fancy picture of the world at that date, when Europe will have converted itself into one vast Socialist Federation. The theatre, he conjectures, will then have become almost exclusively musical. "An exact knowledge of reality" and "a life without violence" will have made the human race almost indifferent to drama and tragedy, while the unification of classes and sex-equality will have deprived comedy of nearly all its subject-matter. Thus M. France arrives (though by another route) at Walter Pater's conclusion, that "all art aspires towards a condition of music." I do not

know whether Mr. H. G. Wells's scientific forecasts of the future have ever dealt with the theatre. If not, one may venture to suggest the subject to him. Meanwhile let us look at M. France's conjectures. Fanciful though they may seem in a world where licensed playhouses are almost as numerous as taverns and pictorial postcard shops, I believe there is a good deal to be said for them.

We may, to begin with, reckon confidently on the disappearance of tragedy. Tragedy was the art of primitive man, reflecting his ferocity, his preoccupation with physical suffering (gouged eyes, flayed skins, mutilated limbs, "Luke's iron crown and Damiens' bed of steel"), his exaggerated interest in death, his terror of the unknown and the unseen. It is true that Aristotle invented the delightful apology of tragedy as a cathartic; but we think Rousseau was nearer the mark when he said people liked it as a means of seeing others suffer without suffering themselves. We do not easily endure tragedy to-day. It survives only in a few classic examples, and even in these the tragic sting has to be taken out. Sir Henry Irving, as I have said, had to drop all the fee-faw-fum business of Richard Crookback, and to present him as a humorist. Mr. Forbes Robertson has been the most acceptable Hamlet of our time, because he insisted on the sunny side of the man, and generally gave Elsinore a thorough "airing." Evidently, tragedy will be the first of the dramatic categories to go by the board. Comedy will follow—at any rate, the comedy of manners and the comedy of intrigue, every form of comedy which assumes social differences. I fancy there is still a long innings before the comedy of character, because this kind depends upon individual

differences, and the Socialist Confederation of 2270 A.D. will scarcely have abolished those. Besides, the craving of the actors for "character parts" is to all appearances quite ineradicable. Then drama, drama proper, according to M. France, will vanish with the popularisation of an "exact knowledge of reality." Who can doubt it? Drama postulates the conflict of individual wills, sudden crises, arbitrary wants. But "drum and trumpet" history is an anachronism, the "great man theory" obsolete, and we read history as a record of gradual economic changes, the resultant of social forces—that is to say, we read it panoramically, not dramatically. "Streams of tendency" are too big for the playhouse. Statistical tables, curves of imports and exports, the rate of wages, and the price of the quartern loaf, are too dull for it. If we had all read Arthur Young and Taine, we should be unable to sit out the average French Revolution play—all guillotines, tumbrils, and Sea-Green Incorruptibles—with patience. Then the psychology of the stage is too summary. Think of what the novel can do in this direction—Mr. Henry James's *Golden Bowl*, for instance. Only the merest fraction of the reality in that book could be conveyed through the medium of the theatre.

I will risk a conjecture on my own account about this spread of "an exact knowledge of reality." It will abolish the theatre by making *acting* impossible. We shall reject acting as by its very nature absurd. For it is in the very nature of acting to present effects divorced from causes. A young man apes an old one by painted wrinkles, a grey wig, and an artificial squeak in his voice. A Londoner who has just dined at his Club, and come down to the theatre in a hansom,

proceeds to harangue the Roman mob over Cæsar's corpse or to fight in full armour with Richmond on Bosworth Field. These imitations of reality pass muster with us, because of our ignorance. But an "exact knowledge of reality" would reveal to us a thousand little touches of age which the young actor has missed, and must miss, because he is not really aged. It would convince us that such a "cause" as a Londoner of to-day, with his individuality and environment and life, cannot by any possibility produce such an "effect" as a Mark Antony or a Richard. Nietzsche has drawn attention to this impossibility in his own blunt fashion. "It is the blissful illusion of actors," says he, "that the historical persons represented by them really have felt as they do during their performance; but in this they are greatly mistaken. Their power of imitation and divination, which they are desirous of representing as a clear-sighted faculty, only penetrates far enough to explain gestures, accents, and looks—in short, the exterior; that is, they grasp the phantom soul of a great hero, statesman, warrior, of an ambitious, jealous, desperate person: they come pretty near the soul, but fail to arrive at the spirit." This "pretty near," which satisfies us to-day in our ignorance, will by and by repel us in our completer knowledge. It is the little rift within the lute. In fact, to the eye of omniscience (the eye we are attributing to 2270 A.D.) there will be no such thing as successful imitation, because nothing ever really duplicates another thing in the universe. Everything stands alone, a point to which myriads of different forces, acting through all conceivable time, have at that moment converged. But in another aspect everything in the universe is

in causal relationship with everything else; so that, as a sage has observed, "If we knew one thing thoroughly, we should know everything." Thus, with an exact knowledge of reality made universal, the subtlest conceivable acting would be but a flagrant imposture. Even as it is, though none of us has the exact knowledge, there lurks in our subconsciousness enough feeling for the essential truth and harmony of things to give us discomfort in the presence of so-called "Protean" acting, the twisting of one personality into the form of another by a *tour de force*. It is significant that we hear less and less of the old complaint that such and such an actor "always plays himself." In reality, it is the best thing he can do. He offends less, in that way, against the inexorable laws of nature. He gives us a greater proportion of effects undivorced from causes, he is less out of harmony with the essential truth of things. Consequently, he is the one actor who will outlive the rest—until his fatal hour comes, *circa* 2270 A.D.

## THE ART OF ACTING

IT is unfortunate, but not surprising, that actors can seldom be got to let us into the secrets of their art. It is not surprising, because acting, which is the art of impersonating other people, is the very opposite of introspective analysis, which is the art of first knowing and then scientifically measuring your own inmost self. The most illuminating things about acting have been said by mere literary critics like Diderot (*Paradoxe sur le Comédien*), who never acted, or like G. H. Lewes (*Actors and Acting*), who did once try to act and succeeded in being perhaps the very worst Shylock ever seen. In a popular magazine, an actor, Mr. Tree, has been discoursing on "How to Act." His remarks are desultory rather than systematic—system, perhaps, ought not to be required from a text that, for all one knows, may have been primarily designed as a suitable margin for photographs—but they are in any case remarks worth examining.

What, according to Mr. Tree, is the proper equipment for an actor? First of all, and this seems matter of course, he must have the impulse to act, the mimetic temperament. Mr. Tree does not analyse this temperament, and there was no need, for we all know it, and indeed all, at some moment or other of our lives, if only for that moment, share it. It belongs, however, peculiarly and especially, to the man whose

bent is towards thinking of himself as being looked at and listened to by his fellows. The born actor is the very opposite of the recluse, the sufferer from agoraphobia. The very idea of him involves the idea of spectators and listeners; like the orator and the dandy, he is of those who, in Buffon's phrase, "parlent au corps par le corps." You cannot imagine Crusoe acting on his island. It was not until Friday appeared, and fell to conveying his feelings in dumb-show, that acting began. Evidently, again, the histrionic temperament must be one peculiarly susceptible to external appearances. An actor must be impressed by the outward and visible signs of things rather than by the things themselves. Here, perhaps, is a reason why acting comes more naturally to women than to men. Is education, as generally understood, good for the actor? Mr. Tree thinks not. For education, as generally understood, means a thorough knowledge of a few subjects; whereas what the actor requires is a little of everything, a little music, a little French, German, and Italian. "The little knowledge which is supposed to be dangerous in most walks of life is the *desideratum* of the stage artist." Education, as generally understood, also tends to the repression of emotion, while the actor lives and moves and has his being in its expression. Further, education, as generally understood, involves continuous and hard reading, but the actor, according to Mr. Tree, can easily have too much reading. It is, he thinks, destructive of the imaginative faculty. This, you remember, was the opinion of Lord Foppington, who preferred the natural sprouts of his own brain to the forced products of other men's. Anyhow, it is pretty clear that Mr. Tree is here preaching to the converted. A man

with a turn for reading is by nature a "solitary," which, as we have just seen, the born actor is not. No more, for that matter, is the born playgoer. Your typical playgoer is not a cloistered student. He belongs *ex hypothesi* to the class which is "fond of company"; he would not, even if he could, imitate Macaulay by reading Plato with his feet on the fender; he must have bustle, the sense of human kinship brought home to him by sitting elbow to elbow with his neighbour; he desires to see and be seen. (Parenthetically, I may suggest that this is why dramatic criticism finds its real public of readers among neither players nor playgoers, but the people who, in Pascal's phrase, "sit still in their parlours.") Further, Mr. Tree does not regard a University education as advantageous to the actor; it represses originality and is ill-calculated to open up the artistic mind. This is rather a backhander for the Benson company and many ornaments of the O.U.D.S. now decorating the London stage. Finally, while insisting on the value of technical training (is there not an Academy of Dramatic Art somewhere in Gower Street?), Mr. Tree counsels the actor to follow his temperament and to rely upon it.

This question of temperament is interesting enough to warrant closer examination. Every stage character consists of two parts, one determinate (call it  $\alpha$ ), indicated by the text, the stage directions, and *nothing else*, the other ( $x$ ), vague and varying, representing the rest of the character, as it is behind the scenes and was before the curtain went up. The reader of the play forms a mental image of  $x$  by deductions from  $\alpha$ , and so gets his conception of the whole character  $\alpha + x$ . I may say, in passing, that the

vice of academic criticism of Shakespeare in this country, as in Germany, is to discuss  $a + x$  as an actual person, forgetting or ignoring that  $a$  is the only part of the character for which we have the poet's warranty, and that  $x$  is merely our own surmise. But that is "another story." The point here is that, while we all have to give a value to  $x$ , we none of us give the same value, since no two imaginations coincide. That is why the student of Shakespeare is always disconcerted when first he sees a favourite play either illustrated in a picture or performed on the stage. This, he says, is all very well, but it is not *my* Romeo or *my* Cordelia. Now the actor's business with  $a$  is comparatively simple. He has to speak the words and do the things set down for him. It is with  $x$  that his real difficulties begin; for in place of our vague, floating notion of the character as a whole he has to offer us his own real person and temperament. Here the *acting* side of him is in the long run far less important than what the man naturally *is*. For it is, of course, flagrantly untrue, though often spoken of as true, that an actor can divest himself of his own personality and put on the personality of someone else. Just as an author is always really identical with his work ("for, after all," as Walter Bagehot said, "we know that authors don't keep tame steam-engines to write their books"), so the actor's histrionic is always part and parcel of his real, everyday self. You may so paint wrinkles on your brow, so modulate your voice and order your bearing as to pass, behind the footlights, for a mad old King of Britain, but the fact remains that you are Mr. Brown, a taxpayer of to-day, with an address in the London Postal Directory, and a pretty taste in claret.

and cigars. This fact will for ever prevent you from absolutely realising *x*. It may even do so in some obvious physical way ("His weak, white, genteel hands, and the shape of his stomach," said Tolstoy, on his visit to *Siegfried*, "betrayed the actor"). But, even though your disguise be perfect, the fact that the soul within you is not the soul of Lear—or rather, not the soul of Shakespeare as projected in Lear—but the soul of Mr. Brown must for ever mark off a measurable distance between *x* and your impersonation. The measure of that distance is, inversely, the measure of your success in the part. On the other hand, your reality (the Mr. Brown in you), while it prevents you from fully and satisfactorily representing *x*—that is to say, coinciding with the spectator's mental image of your part—will give you the great advantage over that vague, pale image of definiteness and substance. What is lost in harmony and perfect propriety of conception is gained in precision and intensity of effect—provided always that your personality is not absolutely at variance with the spectators' conception. You are able to offer him a real man for an imaginary one.

What is the upshot of all this? That your skill as an actor, necessary as it is to get through the plain business of *a* and to give the spectator that measure of illusion without which play-acting becomes mere meaningless nonsense, is of small account as compared with your real self, your personality, your temperament, call it what you will. Are you what young ladies call a "nice" man? Are you "sympathetic," winning people by the mere manner of you as you enter the stage? Are you "magnetic," endowed with the peculiar property of impressing your fellow-creatures

by mere glance and voice and presence? It is by such tests as these that ultimately as an actor you must stand or fall. Salvini, Duse, Bartet, Irving—take any illustrious stage-names you please, and the secret of their greatness will be found not in consummate skill—one takes that item for granted—but in the mystery of temperament.

Mr. Tree's remarks on "How to Act" have a reverse side. They virtually admit that the actor is not as other men, and cannot be. Many actors are peculiarly, and I venture to think rather absurdly, sensitive on this point. They even go so far as to contend that the actor's profession does not stamp him. If that were so he would be the one solitary exception to the general rule that the dyer's hand is subdued to what it works in. I have never heard that those useful domestics whose duties involve constant genuflexion object to being warned against "housemaid's knee," or that "clergyman's sore throat" is a tabooed topic in country parsonages; but it has often been made known that you must never talk of "the histrionic temperament," still less of *cabotinage*. And yet here is Mr. Tree telling us that the good actor is condemned to be a smatterer, to read as little as possible, and to be excluded from a University training. In other words, the peculiar qualifications for life inside the playhouse are what are generally held to be disqualifications for life outside it.

## THE DYNASTS AND THE PUPPETS

M R. THOMAS HARDY'S closet - play *The Dynasts*, like Mr. Charles Surface's conduct, has given several worthy readers cause for much uneasiness. A drama of the Napoleonic wars, "in three parts, nineteen acts, and one hundred and thirty scenes," is, indeed, a fearful sort of wild-fowl. Were Mr. Hardy a contemporary of Théophile Gautier and Augustus Mackeat and Philothée O'Neddy, one might surmise that his whim was to *épater le bourgeois*. In any case the burgess has an uncomfortable sense of disorientation. He is uncertain what to make of *The Dynasts*; he is only certain that it is not what he expected. Where is he to place this so-called "drama"? Clearly, it will not go on the same shelf with either *Macbeth* or *Charley's Aunt*. Apparently, Mr. Hardy himself shares the belief of his critics that he has produced something "new and strange." That is a mistake. The author of *The Dynasts* has not invented a new dramatic or *quasi-dramatic* species. But he has certainly developed it, and given it promotion, an improved *status*. Before any attempt to make this good, however, there is something to be said about one or two general questions which Mr. Hardy raises in his preface.

There is, first, the general question of plays which are not intended to be played, but only to be read, plays "for mental performance," as Mr. Hardy puts it.

To those who urge that an unplayable play is a contradiction in terms he replies that "the question seems to be an unimportant matter of terminology." Compositions cast in the dramatic shape, he says, were without doubt originally written for the stage only; "but in the course of time such a shape would reveal itself to be an eminently readable one." Would it? Has it? Surely not. But even if it be conceded that some plays happen to be readable, does that prove that plays ought to be written in order to be read? By no means. Some plays may be read, just as, *faute de mieux*, shoe-leather may be used as an article of diet instead of as a protection for the feet. But, to adapt a familiar line from an Oxford Prize Poem,

It *may* be eaten, but it is not good.

No, with all respect to Mr. Hardy, the question is much more than an unimportant matter of terminology. It is a question of the relation of means to ends. Just as a play may be readable, so an opera score may be playable in a pianoforte arrangement. Mr. Hardy would call it an opera wherein everything that the piano cannot render is left for mental performance. Most people call it an abuse of the opera, which is intended for the stage, and an abuse of the piano, which is intended for pianoforte music. Surely it is a commonplace that every art-form is conditioned by its medium? The shape, the structure, the points of inflection, the perspective of a play are all determined by the mechanical necessities of the theatre and the fact that it is something to be seen and heard by a spectator. A book, which is something to be read, has no such restrictions; it has others, but not these. If you impose upon a book the form of a play—a form,

that is to say, designed to meet exigencies which in its case do not exist—you are misapplying or wasting the means at your disposal; you are running a sack-race; you are playing fives, like Cavanagh in Hazlitt's essay, with your clenched fist. At the best, you have achieved a *tour de force*. Let me take an example from Mr. Hardy's old profession. It is an elementary principle in architecture that structure is conditioned by material. Stone demands one kind of building, iron another, wood a third. Suppose an architect were laboriously to construct an iron bridge under the limitations proper to a stone bridge, would Mr. Hardy applaud the feat? No, he would say it was bad architecture. So one may say when it is attempted to build a book according to the methods of a play, or a play according to the methods of a book. Lessing has something very much to the point (*Hamburg Dramaturgy*, 5th February, 1768): "It is not enough that a work produces an effect on us"—e.g. that a play is readable—"its effect must also be that which properly belongs to it. . . . What is the use of building a theatre, dressing up men and women, putting their memories to the torture, crowding the whole town into a hall, if any work when represented is only to produce some of the effects which might have been produced by a story read in the chimney-corner?" So one may ask, What is the use of enjoying all the means open to the story-teller if he is to sacrifice most of those means to the vain hope of rivalling the playwright, who has quite other means?

Nor will it do to rely, as Mr. Hardy does, upon the imagination of the reader, or "mental" spectator. "The spectator, in thought, becomes a performer whenever called upon, and cheerfully makes himself the utility

man of the gaps." Unfortunately, the "gaps" in a closet-play, being just those parts of a play which cannot be expressed in dialogue, are its vital parts. The great passions are mute. The culminating point of a play is not a speech, but an action, or a picture of which the effect resides in the mere juxtaposition of certain personages. It is at these moments that the closet-playwright suspends—is bound to suspend—work, while the "mental" spectator comes in and takes up the burden. Asking so much of him, Mr. Hardy is rather unkind to call him merely a utility man. The fact that the whole burden of producing "mental drama" is shifted from the author to the reader at the most important moment of the story seems to me a crushing condemnation of the *genre*. Mr. Hardy is quite right in calling it a "mental performance"; but it is the reader who has to bear the brunt of the performing. And so I fully agree with Mr. Hardy when he goes on to say: "Whether mental performance alone may not eventually be the fate of all drama, other than that of contemporary or frivolous life, is a kindred question not without interest." It has, indeed, a fearful interest for those of us who, like the Shah, prefer to have our dancing done for us. As a matter of fact, the spectacular resources of the romantic stage were never so abundant as they are at present; the art of giving an environment of illusion to the archaic, the mystic, the poetic was never before brought to so high a pitch.

There remains the specific question as to the suitability of *The Dynasts* for stage representation. Obviously it is not possible for the ordinary theatre. It "thinks in continents" and deals in whole fleets and armies, Houses of Commons, vast cathedral congrega-

tions, and thronged streets. That is to say, it is on too vast a scale for the ordinary stage. Further, its scheme includes a "chorus" of spirits, for whom there could be no appropriate place on any stage. Are we, then, with Mr. Hardy, to relegate the play to the region—the No Man's Land—of "mental performance"? Well, one may suggest that this is not after all inevitable. Mr. Hardy himself, it is plain, has hankerings after actual performance, something "taking the shape of a monotonic delivery of speeches, with dreamy conventional gestures, something in the manner traditionally maintained by the old Christmas mummers, the curiously hypnotising impressiveness of whose automatic style—that of persons who spoke by no will of their own—will be remembered by all who ever experienced it. Gauzes or screens to blur outlines might still further shut off the actual." Here Mr. Hardy is "getting warm," as the children say; he has come very near to guessing the way in which his panoramic drama might be performed. For performed his play could be, I feel convinced; because it really is dramatically conceived. I mean that Mr. Hardy—it is the test of the dramatist—always sees things solid. Venables said of Carlyle (Sir M. Grant Duft's *Diary*, March, 1881): "He had a stereoscopic imagination; he put everything before you in a solid shape." That quality, which is a luxury in an historian, is a necessity in a dramatist. You find it in the author of *The Dynasts*; he has a stereoscopic imagination. In other words, he allows himself no passages of analysis, reverie, mere description, or other expedients of the novelist which are non-transferable to space of three dimensions. But, as I have said, no ordinary theatre has the space for a panoramic play. What, then, is the solution? To

anyone who has glanced at the play, with a desire to see it represented, the answer "leaps at the eyes." Speaking of the human protagonists, one of the Spirits describes them as "mere marionettes," and again we read :—

"Forgetting the Prime Mover of the gear  
As puppet-watchers him who pulls the strings."

Indeed, that idea is at the very core of Mr. Hardy's drama, the idea that these Napoleons and Pitts and Nelsons are puppets, blind parts of the Immanent Will. And now you cannot help seeing how this play should be represented ; it should be a puppet-show—or rather (for the perspective of vast crowds is best managed that way) a series of shadow pictures. It would be an adaptation of the puppet-show to philosophic drama. That, as I began by saying, is not an entirely new dramatic species. Some years ago, at the Chat Noir, this very "*Epopée*" of the Napoleonic wars was presented in a series of "*Ombres Chinoises*" designed by M. Caran d'Ache. M. Jules Lemaître speaks enthusiastically of the profound impression created by these little silhouettes, the sense of multitude, of destiny actuating the movements of armies, which is precisely the impression to be created by *The Dynasts*.

Mr. Hardy's philosophic thesis is that the Nietzschean "overmen" of a century ago were puppets. Why not, then, actually *show* them as puppets ? By that means, and by that means alone, the actual mechanism of the performance would be a perpetual symbol and reminder of the philosophy impressing the whole work. Such a chance for securing complete harmony between the medium of expression and the meaning to be expressed is rare indeed. In his preface Mr. Hardy alludes to Æschylus. His mention of that mighty dramatist

serves as a reminder that certain plays of M. Maeterlinck have been described as "de l'Eschyle pour *pupazzi malades*." Withdrawing the epithet "malades," which is inapplicable to Mr. Hardy's robust characters, one may describe *The Dynasts* as "Æschylus for puppets." And to say that is really to pay Mr. Hardy a magnificent compliment.

Like Partridge, many of us "love a puppet-show of all the pastimes upon earth." Happy Partridge! For it was in his time (according to the puppet-showman) that "the present age was not improved in anything so much as in their puppet-shows; which, by throwing out Punch and his wife Joan and such idle trumpery, were at last brought to be a rational entertainment." Since that day (whether by the reintroduction of Punch and Judy I know not) the puppet-shows have declined, and the judicious would catch with delight at the chance offered by *The Dynasts* of bringing them "to a rational entertainment" once again. Of course, for your puppet-show "new model," your puppet-show of high philosophic reach, such a showman as Fielding's honest ignoramus would not suffice. That worthy's philosophy, it will be remembered, did not extend beyond a tolerance of all religions, save that of the Presbyterians, "because they were enemies to puppet-shows," and our new showman would have to be a poet (say Mr. Hardy) rolling out his blank verse as he manipulated the wires. Here and there in *The Dynasts* he would have some practical trouble. For example, in Act vi., scene 5, which describes the meeting of Napoleon and Francis after Austerlitz, the stage direction is "They formally embrace." Anyone who has ever seen an embrace of marionettes will know that it is an exceedingly difficult operation. They fall generally with a jerk into each

other's arms. One trembles to think how they would manage a "formal" embrace between august Sovereigns. But there is one thing even more difficult than embracing on the puppet-stage, and that is the delivery of a letter. On the regular stage this is considered the meanest kind of employment. People cannot render higher testimony to the self-sacrifice of this or that veteran at the Théâtre Français than to say that he will consent to "come on with a letter." Now on the marionette stage this is the greatest exploit of all—the transfer of a letter from one person to another. The ineffectual quiverings, sudden darts, agonised wobblings, desperate shots, and clutches at nothing which take place before the transfer is effected! So, when you read in Act VI., scene 6, of Mr. Hardy's play, the stage direction "Presents a despatch to Pitt," you feel that for the puppets the critical moment has arrived. With careful study, however, these difficulties could be got over. The fact is we want a new *Poetics*—puppet-show *Poetics* ("de l'Aristote pour pupazzi").

Mr. Hardy boldly champions the cause of unplayable plays. To the question why, if you are writing a narrative to be read, forgo all the privileges of narrative art and hamper yourself by the restrictions proper to a spectacle, Mr. Hardy answers, in effect, that is the artist's affair, he has a right to his caprice, and "the artistic spirit is at bottom a spirit of caprice." Well, caprices must be judged by their fruits; and criticism would fail in its duty if it did not point out that this particular "caprice" of aiming by the medium of one art at the pleasure proper to another, a very popular caprice at the present day, is as noxious as it is popular. It has covered, for example, the Academy walls with "anecdote" pictures, pictures which aim at a literary

pleasure and not at the pleasure to be got out of paint. It has filled the circulating libraries with novels of "description," which aim at a "pictorial" pleasure instead of the pleasure of literature. It has filled our playhouses with "adapted" novels, which aim at the pleasure of the novel instead of the pleasure of the play. It has filled our concert-halls with "tone poems" and "programme music," aiming at the pleasure of thought instead of at the pleasure of sound. In short, this artistic "caprice" is one of the direst artistic plagues of the time. Says Mr. Hardy, the artists are there to indulge this or any other "caprice." Yes, and the critics are there to pounce on them, and to distinguish between good caprices and bad. But there need be no talk about "caprice" over *The Dynasts*. Mr. Hardy believes himself to have capriciously written an unplayable play. I have ventured to suggest that he has written a real play without knowing it, and that the means of actual representation lie ready to his hand. But he will not have it, he resents the aspersion of having done something quite regular, and wishes to be regarded as having indulged in a "caprice." This is rather like Lydia Languish, who doated on the contraband "Beverley" but rejected the honourable addresses of Jack Absolute.

## CURIOSITY AND HORROR IN THE THEATRE

TWO questions of more than ephemeral interest are suggested by the present playbill of Wyndham's Theatre (March 1902). The main interest of *Cæsar's Wife* is an interest of curiosity; the sole interest of *Heard at the Telephone* is an interest of horror. What are we to think of these two theatrical interests? To crowds of playgoers they are both very real interests. One must take leave, however, to advance the opinion that the interest of curiosity has a very humble place in the region of art, while the interest of horror has no place in that region at all.

And, first, as to curiosity. That is the distinguishing mark of the child in civilised, and of the adult in savage, communities. The state of mind which is always wondering what is going to happen next, rather than forming judgments upon what has happened, is a naïve state. In primitive periods it accounts for the importance of oracles, prophets, and soothsayers. It still makes kitchen-maids the ready victims of "fortune-tellers" and the eager readers of *Zadkiel's Almanac*. In a higher stratum of intelligence it means the popularity of the "detective novel"; curiosity here becoming a mere amusement, a form of dilettantism, so that men of really gigantic intellect, but of a intellect which is dormant on the artistic side—Darwin and Bismarck are illustrations of the type—are accustomed to take delight in the stories of

Gaboriau, du Boisgobey, and Conan Doyle. To the average mind a "mystery" is always more fascinating than the co-ordination and analysis of ascertained facts. That is why someone or other will always be discovering Bacon "ciphers"; such things appeal to the average man more intimately than the pleasure of reading either Bacon's or Shakespeare's works for what they are. The same feeling, the preference of the mysterious, the unaccountable, to the rational, scientifically explicable, moved the numerous supporters of the Tichborne claimant. So, the interest still taken in the authorship of Junius's letters is an interest wholly unconcerned with the literary or political importance of their contents. The clever "boom" of *An English-woman's Love Letters* is another case in point. To return to drama, the aim of the great artist is not to surprise the spectator with an unforeseen, but to gratify him with an "inevitable," action. It is not to provoke his curiosity about what is going to happen so much as to excite in him a keen desire that a certain thing shall happen, and then to satisfy that desire to the full. To the Greek dramatists the interest of curiosity was virtually unknown; or, if they knew it, they despised the use of it. *Oedipus Tyrannus* is perhaps an exception, though even in that play the spectator's feeling is not so much curiosity about what is going to happen as sympathetic anguish for the victim of a fate which the spectator knows, but the victim does not know, to be impending. The state of feeling is very like that excited by Maeterlinck's poignant little play of *Intérieur*, wherein the spectator sees a drowned body being brought home. The shadows of the as yet happy family are seen on the window-blind, and the interest is not in what will happen behind that blind when the

body is brought in—we all know the commotion, the horror, the grief that will ensue—but in the contrast between the present happiness of the household and the thought of the sudden end to that happiness which is impending. So indifferent were the Greek dramatists to the interest of curiosity that they did not scruple to announce their plot in advance. Euripides used prologues for this very purpose. Lessing, commenting on the practice in his *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, maintains that “the dramatic interest is all the stronger and keener the longer and the more certainly we have been allowed to foresee everything,” and he adds, “so far am I from holding that the end ought to be hidden from the spectator that I don’t think the enterprise would be a task beyond my strength were I to undertake a play of which the end should be announced in advance, from the very first scene.” Lessing was something of a fanatic where the Greeks were concerned, but he had the root of the matter in him. And the fact remains, that the question put in *Cæsar’s Wife*—which of two possible women is guilty of an adulterous intrigue?—is a trivial question compared with the questions which the playwright treats as of minor importance—why the guilty woman came to be guilty, and what will be the consequences of her guilt?

As to the theatrical use of sheer horror, there is always a tendency to it. In the first place, the spectacle of helpless physical suffering has a secret attraction for the primeval brute—the *gorille féroce* as Taine calls it—which slumbers in all of us. A poor dog run over in a London street will attract a fascinated crowd, gathered not to assist but to gloat. Burke said that a theatre where a tragedy was a-playing

would at once be deserted by an audience who learnt that a real execution was going on outside. But in default of the real bloodshed, the audience will content itself with the sham. Dandin, the judge in Racine's comedy of *Les Plaideurs*, offers to amuse Isabelle by the spectacle of a little torturing. "Eh ! Monsieur," exclaims Isabelle—"Eh ! Monsieur, peut-on voir souffrir des malheureux ?" and Dandin, in his reply, speaks for a large proportion of the human race: "Bon ! cela fait toujours passer une heure ou deux."

Hence the popularity of the torture scene in *La Tosca*. Besides, there is a law in æsthetics, which corresponds to the physiological law that a steady level of sensation can only be maintained by increasing doses of stimulant. Tastes jaded by the merely terrible crave for the horrible. And so we have such exhibitions as that of *Heard at the Telephone*, wherein a man, conversing with his wife at a great distance by this instrument, is driven raving mad by hearing thieves breaking into the house and murdering her. He can do nothing; it is as though the murder were being committed in his presence, while he is gagged and bound. Now such incidents do not belong to dramatic art, because that art deals with the collision of human wills, whereas in this incident we have merely the spectacle of human powerlessness. They humiliate our common human dignity. A man overwhelmed by an avalanche is no more than a fly or a gnat. Conceive some man revered among men, a Socrates or a John Wesley or a George Washington, fallen among cannibals, tortured before our eyes, then cooked and eaten—You turn with a faugh ! even from the mental picture. So there are things in the massacre of Cawnpur which no one to this day dares to think of.

There are some calamities so dreadful, so irreconcilable with a rational universe, that we can only writhe over the thought of them with an agonised cry of Why? Why? Why? The dramatist who uses such themes as these (and the telephone story is one of them) is travelling outside the region of art. They belong to the region of what Aristotle called *ἀτύχημα*, sheer accident, misadventure, the irrational element of life. The sensation excited by the picture of them is too violent to be an æsthetic sensation, we are oppressed and shocked by it, whereas the aim of all art, even of tragic art, is to exhilarate and relieve. For the same reason no skill is demanded for such exhibitions. There is skill in the first scene of *Heard at the Telephone*, wherein we see the family of women left unprotected in the lonely house, and fear gradually mastering them as a sense grows upon them of something uncanny, some hidden presence in the place. It is the same effect which has been attained, on a higher plane of workmanship, in Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse*. But in the actual telephone scene there is no skill. The idea suffices of itself. The pit receives the scene with "thunders of applause"? Yes, and the fact suggests a train of by no means agreeable reflections. Evidently the primeval man lurking within us is more potent than some of us had thought; evidently the lust for strong emotion is a far more considerable force than respect for art; evidently we still have our Dandins, with their "Bon! cela fait toujours passer une heure ou deux." Once more the commonplace is brought home to us, that our civilisation is only skin-deep.

## EURIPIDES

### HIPPOLYTUS

(LYRIC THEATRE, *June 1904*)

IN the “penny gaff” of a little village on the Norman littoral I once heard a comic singer extolling celibacy. He praised it, if I remember rightly, because it was cheap. The idiotic refrain of his song still lingers in my ear:—

“J’ai choisi, donc, le célibat  
Le céli—céli—célibat.”

That is the case of Hyppolytus in this tragedy of Euripides. He has chosen celibacy, not, to be sure, because it is cheap, but because it is pure. He declares himself—

“stainless quite. No woman’s flesh  
Hath e’er this body touched. Of all such deed  
Naught wot I, save what things a man may read  
In pictures or hear spoke; nor am I fain,  
Being virgin-souled, to read or hear again.”

Further, he is a woman-hater. He objects to the place and function of woman in the scheme of creation—

“O God, why hast Thou made this gleaming snare,  
Woman, to dog us on the happy earth?”

Anticipating Benedick’s reflection that the earth must be peopled, he suggests that it would have been

a better arrangement if we could buy "new child-souls" of the gods with hard cash, just as Sir Thomas Browne wished that human beings could have been "grown" like trees. To the modern playgoer this virgin-souled misogynist is distinctly amusing. Of course, I use the word amusing in its wider and nobler sense—the sense in which it was used by D. G. Rossetti when he said that poetry, whatever else it is, must be amusing. Pope, in one of his letters, speaks of the "amusing power of poetry." A celibate hero, then, is amusing to us moderns. Our contemporary stage will not have him at any price. Thouvenin, in *Denise*, pleaded for him, but in vain.

This is the real question about the *Hippolytus*, as presented in Mr. Gilbert Murray's rhymed verse translation: What is its amusing power for us to-day? One was occasionally bored by the Chorus. The Chorus has some exquisitely beautiful things to say, or rather to sing, but one heard them only imperfectly. There were moments when the Chorus seemed to be crying "Matches," falteringly, and then to add, *sotto voce*, "We hope to goodness nobody hears us." All the rest was immensely amusing. The chief source of pleasure was the "modernity" of the whole affair. First of all, the modernity of Euripides. It is, of course, a commonplace to remark that Euripides is conspicuously modern. The text-books and commentaries all hammer away at that. And M. Jules Lemaitre has turned some of Euripides' dialogue into the contemporary slang of the boulevard and the *barrière*. But there are certain features of the performance at the Lyric Theatre which are modern over and above the inherent modernity of the work, modern in spite of Euripides, modern just because of the difference

between B.C. 429 and A.D. 1904. Let me try to distinguish between these two aspects of the matter.

And, first of all, as to the supernatural "machinery." Ostensibly, it is the anger of the goddess Aphrodite with a too exclusive devotee of the goddess Artemis which causes all the mischief in the story. But Mr. Murray tells you, and you believe him, that the two goddesses are not real goddesses. They are not real goddesses any more than the snakes in the "mongoose" story were real snakes. They are, in fact, forces of nature. What could be more modern? Phædra's passion is a disease, and Hippolytus's virginity of soul a morbid condition of the blood. Does not M. Pierre Janet, on the staff of the Salpétrière, tell us that love is only a neurosis? Phædra is a neuropath. The false accusation she brings, upon her suicide, is a familiar mark of hystero-epilepsy. The root-idea of the play, then, is startlingly modern. Phædra is a modern *détriquée*, even in her pleasures. Look at the things which she singles out as her own peculiar private gratifications—

" And many are delights beneath the sun !  
Long hours of converse ; and to sit alone  
Musing—a deadly happiness !—and shame."

She snatches a fearful joy from happiness that is "deadly," and has even been able to hug her shame. And Hyppolytus—yes, the virgin-souled Hyppolytus—has (like a public school) his modern side. He makes a remark about woman (to the intense annoyance of his simple *vieux jeu* father) which sounds for all the world like a quotation from Schopenhauer—

" Through every woman's nature one blind strand  
Of passion winds, that men scarce understand."

Most of all is he modern in the supreme and fastidious "elegance" of his *amours*. For, while reviling women, mere flesh-and-blood women, he is all the time in love with a goddess. There is no mistake about it. He calls Artemis his "mistress loved," he gloats (with reverence) over her "golden hair." His love has the distinguishing mark of all love—joy in monopoly—

"For, sole of living men, this grace is mine,  
To dwell with thee."

What is more, Artemis (discreetly) returns his love—and tells her love, when there can be no harm in it—

"... him I loved best of mortality."

This little Platonic romance is deliciously modern. It is the Troubadour and the Princess Far-away; Ruy Blas and Doña Maria; Count Fersen and Marie Antoinette. For two pins I would call the "virgin-souled" Hippolytus the most subtly and perversely sensual of amorists. He reminds one of an eighteenth-century Venetian *raffiné* secretly intriguing with a nun. As to the Nurse, she is palpably, grossly, truculently modern. In her Euripides out-Shakespeares Shakespeare and out-Merediths Meredith. The Greeks "of the best period" called her "immoral," but that was because the Greeks of the best period had not risen to the idea of "unmorality." To be "unmoral" is to be inexpugnably modern. Listen to the woman's contempt for respectable *bourgeois* "gigmanity":—

"A straight and perfect life is not for man;  
Nay, in a shut house, let him, if he can,  
'Mid sheltered rooms, make all lines true."

But "overmen" (and "overwomen") ought to "love on

and dare." This is your right Nietzschean doctrine of "Live dangerously."

The inventory of modern articles in the Euripidean stock is not yet exhausted. The idea of the binding oath, which prevents Hippolytus from telling all he knows and the Chorus from telling all they know, and so "dishing" the whole tragedy, may seem at first sight what schoolboys call a "stumper." But we have plenty of plays to-day which turn upon expedients quite as artificial as this, plays which would fall to pieces if somebody would only open his mouth. And Euripides' use of the sanctity of an oath is not a whit more forced than is Scott's in the trial of Effie Deans. It is, to be sure, on the technical side that our search for modern features in a Greek tragedy is most likely to be baffled. Nevertheless, the suicide of Phædra on the other side of a closed door is also a modern effect. There is nothing, says Victor Hugo, so thrilling as a tragedy on the other side of a closed door. And remember Maeterlinck's *Mort de Tintagiles*. Mr. Murray himself remarks (in speaking of Theseus' allusion to his wife's "fit of the old cold anguish") that "it is characteristic of Euripides to throw these sudden lights back on the history of his characters." A very modern trick of technique, this; as readers of Ibsen know.

These are some of the modern things in Euripides. He is not responsible for certain other modern things to be found in the performance at the Lyric. The grouping of the Chorus about the steps of the Temple suggests an Academy picture of the eighties—or whenever "Sir Frederick" was P.R.A. It is quite certain that a picture of this sort was not presented in the Theatre of Dionysus; equally certain that no modern

"producer" of a Greek tragedy can avoid "thinking in pictures." He has no choice; the relative positions of players and audience demand it. As pictures go, you may like best the final one, when the crowd stand petrified, with arms stiff and palms turned outwards, at the descent of the goddess Artemis. Where the modernity of the presentation comes out, perhaps, most curiously is in the *listening*. When an actor had to spout one of his long speeches, what did the listener do B.C. 429? I doubt if he took any part in the stage-picture at all. If he did, he would be wearing an expressionless mask, and would simply stand at ease. To-day, he has to stand to attention, to be all ears, all facial play; has, in fact, to listen for all he is worth. Our actors are trained to be good listeners; but then they never have to listen to speeches for ten minutes by the clock. At the Lyric they have to apply their modern methods to an ancient *coupe* of dialogue—and the effect is a little odd.

This is not the actors' fault. Some of them do wonderfully well. The Phædra of Miss Edyth Olive is by no means unworthy to compare with the Phèdre of Mme. Bernhardt. It has classic dignity and breadth, and at the same time the romantic "thrill." It will be long before some of us forget the figure of this young actress facing the Chorus to deliver the long speech—

"O women, dwellers in this portal-seat  
Of Pelops'land . . ."

or the music of her utterance. Mr. Ben Webster's Hippolytus, Mr. Brydone's Theseus, and Mr. Granville Barker's Messenger are all careful, intelligent performances, and the rival goddesses, Miss Florence Bourne

and Mrs. Gwendolen Bishop, are goddesses who take care to be distinctly heard. As the Nurse Mrs. A. B. Tapping was a little too "monumental." One missed the meaning glance, the wheedling tongue, the "gusto" (as Hazlitt would have said) of the character.

But the amusing power of this great Greek tragedy done into worthy English and competently played is tremendous. That is the thing that matters. It may well be that I have exaggerated the "modernity" of Euripides—a critic is always tempted to "make out a case"—but I certainly have not overstated the quantity of my pleasure.

## *ELECTRA*

(COURT THEATRE, January 1906)

NO doubt it has occurred to most of us, when at school, to wish that we had been born Greeks "of the best period." It would have saved us much toil, and stripes not a few. The mere linguistic advantage would have been enormous. We should have known all about verbs in  $\mu\iota$  from our cradles, and aorists would have come as naturally to us as our second teeth. But there would have been a still more magnificent "score" for us. We should not have missed a single "thrill" in assisting at the performance of a Greek tragedy. Its story would have been familiar to us from the nursery, and we should no more think of doubting its truth than we now think of scoffing at the Sermon on the Mount. It would have filled us with religious awe, shaken us with genuine terror, moved us to floods of tears, gratified our taste for dexterous forensic debate, indulged our craving for a glimpse of supernatural beings—and it would have combined these joys with music and dancing, the refreshing breezes of the open air in the most delightful of climates, and the spectacle of all the big-wigs of the city in their best clothes. Further, all this pleasure would have come to us in the guise of a social duty; we should at once have been "having a good time" and "doing the proper thing." Happy, happy Greeks to the best period !

How different our fate to-day! In a stuffy theatre, not in the least like the original, we look on at something which we never even begin to believe in, and though we derive a considerable amount of pleasure from the process, it is a very chequered pleasure. We are wearied by the long speeches. We are worried by the chorus. Too many of the characters are like the bore whom Disraeli met at Gibraltar; they are for ever expounding the obvious. What most annoys us is that the things in the story which we are dying to see are the very things which—it would almost seem maliciously—are kept out of sight; the magic-lantern is always extinguished just when the most exciting slide is due. It is true that someone is then obligingly sent on to tell us that *he* has seen the slide, and that it really *was* exciting; whereat, of course, we are more annoyed than ever, learning that we have just missed what this fellow has had the luck to fall in for.

Of course there are reasons for all the things that disconcert and puzzle us. We were taught those reasons at school, and, even if (as sometimes happens) we have since forgotten them, text-books are cheap. We know all about the historical spirit, all about the Chorus conventions and the Messenger conventions, all about the god out of a machine, all about everything. But the question is not what we *know* of Greek tragedy, but what exact amount and kind of pleasure we get out of its performance (in a translation, under necessarily changed conditions of performance) at the present moment. Our knowledge, of course, does make a difference. It saves us from that utter bewilderment which would assuredly beset the absolutely unsophisticated, uninstructed spectator of a Greek tragedy at the present time. It even adds

slightly to our pleasure ; it adds the sense of satisfaction which the mind experiences in perceiving the underlying reasonableness of things superficially *bizarre*. But that is an intellectual pleasure—the same kind of pleasure we enjoy in solving a proposition of Euclid. It is not a theatrical pleasure. And that brings me to the point. What is the precise amount of theatrical pleasure—pleasure proper to the art of drama—which we derive from Mr. Gilbert Murray's rhymed translation of Euripides' *Electra*, as presented at the Court Theatre?

Well, you begin by being pleased with the peasant, Electra's husband. A right Tolstoyan peasant this. He is too delicate, knows his place too well, to be anything but a "spiritual" husband to a lady so high-born. It is what the French call (M. Lemaître has written a play on the theme) a *mariage blanc*. He is a true gentleman, too ; hospitable as some old mountain "solitary" in Wordsworth, and not ashamed of his poor fare, knowing that "gentle" men "will take good cheer or ill With even kindness." And then you find pleasure in Electra for her natural housekeeping vexation when her "man" invites "visitors" on a banyan-day. Here, indeed, we recognise the touch of "our Euripides the human." Even more pleasurable than the humanity of Euripides is his subtle observation, his quite modern psychology, of the female sex. He presents Electra as soured, exasperated by the starvation of the natural affections of woman (the seamy side of the *mariage blanc*). He presents Clytemnestra as having something to say for herself; no mere *traitresse* of melodrama, but a complex person who might have read *Man and Superman*. You are pleased, again, with the old retainer. He reminds one of Shakespeare's

Adam. (If I lug in these modern comparisons it is with a purpose. They show that we have one pleasure denied to the Greek of the best period, the pleasure of letting the mind wander through the ages, the pleasure of recognising the innumerable points of contact between the "classic" and the "romantic.") Also you have pleasure in detecting the artifices of Euripides the playwright—as, for instance, in the matter of Orestes' identity. Common sense suggests the question at the outset: Why does not Orestes say who he is at once and have done with it? The answer, of course, is that Euripides wanted his old Adam, wanted speeches from Electra that could never have got themselves spoken had she known at once that the stranger was her brother, wanted his "recognition" scene. Euripides, you see, was not only "human," he was *malin*. No doubt the recognition scene now pleases us less for its own sake than for its suggestion of its vast theatrical progeny—all those "strawberry marks" that have identified "long-lost brothers" since the year 413 B.C.

But perhaps this is "seeking noon at fourteen o'clock." After all, the main pleasure you get from this *Electra* is the pleasure mankind has always got: the sense of beauty, dignity, sympathy for human suffering not ignobly borne, and the "connoisseur" pleasure in choice workmanship, rhythm, *la ligne*. Mr. Murray's verse is of the choicest, and though I incur the ridicule cast on our old friend "the pedant in Hierocles" who sampled a house by a brick, I cannot resist quoting this single specimen:—

"The grim  
Troy spoils gleam round her throne, and by each hand  
Queens of the East, my father's prisoners, stand,

A cloud of Orient robes and tangling gold.  
And there upon the floor the blood, the old  
Black blood, yet crawls and cankers, like a rot  
In the stone."

And, in the catalogue of pleasures, let me not forget the pleasure of witnessing some really good acting, especially good on the spindle side. Miss Edith Wynne-Matthison, who as Electra bears the burden of the performance on her shoulders, makes an extremely impressive figure of the heroine, impressive in varied moods, now stately and statuesque, now mere womanly, and again a passionate semi-hysterical *révoltée*. The brief appearance of Clytemnestra is long enough for Miss Edyth Olive to present a real character, a "disquieting" temperament; one understands the fascination of Aegisthus. Is not Mr. Harcourt Williams a rather forcible-feeble Orestes? The question, after all, may be a compliment; for it may be that forcible-feebleness is the true "note" of the Euripidean Orestes. Mr. J. H. Barnes is capital as old Adam. As to the Chorus, no doubt the ladies do their best; it is not their fault that they cannot present, either in evolution, intonation, or significance, a genuine Greek chorus.

## SHAKESPEARE

### *THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA*

(COURT THEATRE, April 1904)

THERE is a subtle fascination for many of us in the more faulty work of a great artist. For one thing, it brings him, just for a moment, into line with us; we feel that he is human after all and no mere monster of perfection. We like to note the prentice hand in *Waverley*, and do not altogether dislike the symptoms of decrepitude in *Count Robert of Paris*. There is something repellent in absolute flawlessness, and we should hate the man who discovered the lost arm of the Venus in the Louvre. Nor does that feeling fully explain the fascination of the imperfect. A crude sketch often tells you more about the artist than a finished picture. And in literature there are half-failures which give you more intimate revelations of life than whole successes; *L'Éducation Sentimentale* provokes sharper thrills than *Madame Bovary*. What a comfort that Shakespeare had his weaker, that is to say, his earlier, moments! "Every schoolboy knows" the faults of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and one is quite content to leave them to the schoolboys.

I had never seen the play (it has only been played in London once or twice in my time) until it was

revived at the Court Theatre the other night. I went with no little misgiving, and came away under so strong a charm that I almost told the cabman "To Mantua—by sea!" Was it Shakespeare that one had been enjoying or something from the *Théâtre Impossible* of Alfred de Musset? Who were these twain under the lady's balcony—Proteus and Thurio, or Cyrano de Bergerac and his "cadet de Gascogne"? And all this casuistry of love, was it not Marivaux—turned into archaic English? No, evidently it was Shakespeare. A leaflet, distributed with the playbill, was sufficient evidence of that . . . Dr. Brandes . . . Schlegel . . . John Kemble . . . Meres's *Palladis Tamia* . . . the usual thing. I do not reproach the compiler; he did his work thoroughly. But one cannot abide a wheel, however well made, when it is used to break a butterfly. One does not want the mood created by a Shakesperian love-comedy to be disturbed by horrid matter-of-fact comments. In such a mood references to Shakespeare's borrowings from George de Montemayor are as tiresomely irrelevant as the latest Stock Exchange quotations. It is a mood of sheer hedonism. We are intent upon our pleasure, romantic, languid, voluptuous pleasure. The nights are warm in Mantua, and the ladies, though virtuous, unashamedly amorous. A rope-ladder, as Valentine knows, is an article that no gentleman's wardrobe should be without. We feel our moral standard pleasantly giving way. We can even sympathise with Proteus. He loves Julia, and no wonder, for she is as sleek and as soft and as full of mischief as a Persian kitten. The next moment, Julia being out of the way, he transfers his heart to Silvia. Why not? What could any gentleman, with eyes in his head, say to Silvia if not what Disraeli said to the

Duchess who was inquisitive about Cabinet secrets—"You darling!" I observe that some writers have taken the fickle Proteus quite seriously. His conduct pains them. "Et moi qui vous croyais homme du monde!" they seem to say—as the chemist's assistant in Labiche's farce said to the man who gave him a black eye. Proteus is "no gentleman." Thus do we confound the *Pays de Tendre* with the Metropolitan Cab Radius. It is true that Shakespeare makes Proteus ashamed of himself in the end—just five bare lines of repentance. But that is "only his"—Shakespeare's—"fun." For my part, I feel sure that he had "been there." Proteus is his hint of a Don Juan "caught young"—or a Cherubino grown up. The thought gives an agreeable Mozartian blend to our pleasures. Then comes a touch of Schubert with "Who is Silvia?" I liked Mr. Holthoir's modest, breathless singing of this song better than many concert "renderings" I have heard. And he makes so handsome a Sir Thurio that you half wonder how Silvia could find it in her heart to reject him for either of the Veronese gentlemen. But I am forgetting that the play is not *A Gentleman of Mantua*. Sir Eglamour, too, is a very pretty fellow. An inconsolable widower? Fudge. All the rest (save the bandits) live "for climate and the affections." And one sits in the Court Theatre, sympathising and approving. Decidedly, this play does not make for austerity. But even the austere Pascal wrote a treatise on "Les Passions de l'Amour," and sages like Michelet and Renan—when quite elderly men, as old as the Duke of Milan or Antonio, father to Proteus—laboriously analysed these passions. Why, even this same Duke of Milan poses (falsely, but plausibly enough to

deceive Valentine) as what they call on the Boulevards  
a *vieux marcheur*—

“There is a lady in Verona here  
Whom I affect, but she is nice and coy  
And nought esteems my aged eloquence;  
Now therefore would I have thee to my tutor.”

Whereupon Valentine gives him “tips.” Is there not, by the way, just a tinge of “decadence” in this spectacle of a youngster instructing the greybeard whom he would make his father-in-law in the tricks of abduction and the use of “ladders, quaintly made of cords”? But I do not wonder that Valentine was caught by the deception. Nothing is so flattering to a young man as to be consulted by his senior as an authority on lady-killing. These little touches in *The Two Gentlemen* ought to tell the intelligent spectator more about the secrets of Shakespeare’s own life than whole volumes of facts about second-best bedsteads.

And the two ladies, Julia and Silvia, reveal to us, if we will but keep our eyes open, a good deal about the damsels of (Shakespeare’s) Stratford. Their complete absorption in love, as the only thing in the world a woman ought to concern herself with, is as naïve as in Boccaccio’s—or Brantôme’s—women. And you observe that these women are played by our actresses to-day with perfect naturalness, without any sense of a changed point of view either on their part or the spectator’s; whereas the men obviously “date.” You draw your own conclusions—and, if you are wise, will keep them to yourself. The lessee of the Court Theatre has done an excellent thing in reviving this delicious comedy of love. He might, by the way,

head his playbill with an appropriate remark of Dryden's (*Essay of Dramatic Poesy*): "Love is the most frequent of all the passions, and, being the private concernment of every person, is soothed by viewing its own image in a public entertainment."

## *MUCH ADO*

(HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE, *January 1905*)

IT is complained by a few people who ought to know better, and by many more who may be charitably assumed to know nothing, that Mr. Tree takes unpardonable liberties with Shakespeare, embroiders the text with new business, over-elaborates the scenic background, and has his own way of interpreting the stage-directions. Tiresome as it is to be forced to expound the obvious, one must remind these good people that the Shakespearian text—even assuming that we possess the true text, which pretty clearly we do not—hardly ranks as a holy sacrament. The brutal fact is that Shakespeare was a man, and a man who, working three centuries ago, could but make the best of the tools then at his command. We of to-day go to the theatre with precisely the same object as the playgoers of Shakespeare's time—to be interested and amused. We go, that is to say, for our pleasure, and, in the theatre (which is not a library or a lecture-hall) we care not a jot for Shakespeare except in so far as he subserves our pleasure. I am aware that there are certain enthusiasts—for instance, the Elizabethan Stage Society—who attempt (it can never be a wholly successful attempt) to revive Shakespeare intact, and as originally played. These efforts have their place in an edu-

tional curriculum, but none in the catalogue of pleasures. Reconstitute the Elizabethan stage as you may, you cannot restore the Elizabethan frame of mind. Even supposing that our stage had remained unaltered in its mechanical conditions for three centuries, even supposing that an Edwardian audience had virtually the same mental equipment as an Elizabethan audience, a *fixed* Shakespearian tradition would still be out of the question. As an artist, Shakespeare was primarily a pleasure-monger, and therefore to strike us as his old self he must constantly be putting on a new self. As Mr. Balfour has pithily expressed it in his *Foundations of Belief*, a "steady level of æsthetic sensation can only be maintained by increasing doses of æsthetic stimulant." We talk, it is true, of the "immortal" classics; but the principle of life in a classic is this very principle of perpetual change. Sainte-Beuve in a famous essay defined a classic as "énergique, frais et dispos." And how does it remain "fresh"? By its property of self-renewal, the property of responding in different ages to different demands for pleasure.

Mr. Tree, then, is not only justified in giving us a fresh treatment of Shakespeare; he simply cannot help himself, if he would keep Shakespeare alive; and the text-worshippers, the strait sect which would turn Elizabethan stage-directions into phylacteries, are in reality the people who can only think of Shakespeare as dead. Their absurd attitude is at the acme of absurdity when adopted over such a play as *Much Ado About Nothing*, which as a play is as bad as bad can be. It is just the play which Aristotle might have had, by anticipation, in mind when he dwelt on the supreme importance of plot. Everybody knows the weaknesses of *Much Ado*. It has

the initial weakness—shared with many another of Shakespeare's plays—of a dramatised novel. In the church scene Claudio is cheerfully degraded into a blackguard for the sake of a *coup de théâtre*. The cock-and-bull story of Hero's death is invented, and Claudio is turned into a weak ass, for the sake of another *coup de théâtre* in the final scene. What, then, is it that, despite its crying faults, makes *Much Ado* so delightful? It is, to begin with, its strong and pulsing vitality—the expression of Shakespeare's experiencing and enjoying faculty—the intense animal, semi-savage vitality of Benedick and Beatrice, the "May of youth and bloom of lustihood" in Claudio, the enduring vitality of Leonato and Antonio leaping out into flame in their old age, the minx-like vitality of Margaret and Ursula, the roystering and bacchanalian vitality of Borachio, the sturdy bovine vitality of Dogberry. And then it is its *panache*, its careless non-moral Renaissance romance. And, again, it is its Hugo-esque touch of the luridly-fiendish in Don John set against the shifting polychromatic revel of masque and dance. Here is the "virtue" of the play, the set of elements by which it lives; and all the questions we need ask ourselves about the present revival are concerned with these elements. Does it make the best of them? Are they helped or are they hindered by Mr. Tree's innovations?

I believe that any jury of "average sensual men" will unhesitatingly find for Mr. Tree on both counts. The acting is brimming over with that vitality which, as I have said, is the prime characteristic of the play. Mr. Tree "keeps the pot a-bilin'" as merrily as Mr. Pickwick when hustled down the slide by Sam Weller. There are parts, it may be, in which his temperament

would be more comfortably at home ; his Benedick is, however, a very careful and on the whole successful "composition." If, as has been objected, he has his own way with stage directions, I can see no harm in it. He climbs a tree in the scene in the arbour instead of hiding behind the usual shrubbery, he jots down "The God of Love, that sits above" on his tablets instead of singing the song—and why should he not ? There is tremendous vitality in Mr. Calvert's Dogberry—an altogether admirable piece of work. But this Dogberry harangues the watch from a window, instead of from the causeway. Heavens, what sacrilege ! Vitality, again, is the mark of the scene in Leonato's garden, which in Mr. Tree's version becomes the capital scene of the play—the vitality of nature as well as of men and women. Moonlight dwindleth to darkness, darkness greys into dawn, dawn glows into broad sunshine ; a strepitous carnival is stilled to dead silence, which gives way to the song of birds and cheerful morning sounds—always there is movement, always a sense of life. But the stage-directions give no warrant for all this. Bless us and save us ! Nor do they authorise Beatrice in leaving the church for the cloisters before bidding Benedick "Kill Claudio !" Accordingly the question has been gravely asked whether secular incidents may or may not take place without impropriety in an Italian church. And why, I ask in my turn, does all sense of humour desert so many excellent people when they go to see Shakespeare acted ? And—good gracious !—I had almost forgotten the oranges. There are oranges at His Majesty's, real oranges, one of which is stolen by a page under Leonato's very nose—and Mr. Tree has no textual warrant for either his oranges or his

thieving page, and someone or other hints, not darkly, that he is no better than a contriver of pantomime. What would Shakespeare have said to a commentator of this calibre? I think I can guess. "Via, goodman Dull!"

## *HAMLET*

(ADELPHI THEATRE, *April 1905*)

THE time has long gone by for the extravagance of rapture over a new Hamlet. Our perfervid forefathers went crazy over a Betterton and almost corybantic over a Garrick. Those were the days of the "sublime"; when ghosts were ghosts, smelling of real sulphur that could be appreciated by the nostrils of the Footmen's Gallery, not transient embarrassed phantoms explained away by a Psychical Research Society; when a play was the more enjoyed the more it digressed into what Mr. Pinero's broken-down tragedian calls "real speeches"; when "pity" and "terror" were genuine, not to say fashionable, emotions, instead of being far-fetched quotations from Aristotle. In those days, then, a new Hamlet was as important as a new comet, or a new religion, or a new House of Commons. We take our new Hamlets more coolly now, after the fashion of the turkey-hen, celebrated in immortal verse by Marjorie Fleming, who

" . . . was more than usual calm  
And did not give a single dam."

For we have grown a little weary, like Hamlet himself, of words, words, words—words that we know by heart long before the speaker utters them—words that have acquired the hollow reverberation of an ecclesiastical

ritual—and, further, we have had in our time to associate Hamlet with personalities so numerous and so diverse that we begin, like the American young lady after a ball-supper, to “guess we’re pretty well crowded.” If it is a duty to remember the curious and characteristic Hamlet of Sir Henry Irving, it is a pleasure to forget the daringly *décolleté* Hamlet of the late Mr. Wilson Barrett. There was M. Mounet Sully’s Hamlet, as mad as a hatter, who reminded one of Dr. Johnson’s saying that if *he* had played Hamlet, he “would have frightened the ghost.” Some of us declared Mr. Forbes Robertson’s Hamlet to be the very man, until Mme. Sarah Bernhardt persuaded us that hers was the very woman. Others, again, have shed tears over the Werther-Hamlet of Mr. Beerbohm Tree. Then there was the athletic Hamlet of Mr. Benson, who carried off the corpse of Polonius on his shoulders. The only Hamlet we have not had the advantage of seeing in this country is the “steel-cage” Hamlet, not long ago a great favourite in the United States with audiences who were able to throw missiles at him, safe behind his bars, without interrupting the performance. It may be perverse, but I confess I should like to add him to my collection.

Meanwhile, we have a new Hamlet in Mr. H. B. Irving, who—despite our feelings of repletion in the matter of Hamlet—is entitled to our sympathetic attention for two excellent *a priori* reasons, not to mention the others. In the first place he has the honour to be the son of his father. Nothing gives the sense of theatrical continuity like the handing on of a classic part from one player to another of the same name and blood. Actors in such case become the Lucretian torch-bearers: *vitaī lampada tradunt*. Con-

noisseurs in heredity will no doubt detect all sorts of resemblances between the Hamlets of Irving *père* and *fils*. We are given, however, to understand that the son has not actually seen his father in the part ; and I have certainly no intention of comparing the two. For (and this is the second of our two reasons for according the new Hamlet a hearty welcome) Mr. Irving has the honour to be himself. He has established an independent reputation ; to the knowledge of all playgoers he has a temperament and a talent of his own. The temperament is perhaps a little hard, a temperament of more force than grace ; the talent dry (in the champagne sense) rather than rich. There are supple players, with personalities like Squire Brooke's mind, which was "a jelly that ran easily into any mould." Mr. Irving is not one of these. His individuality is sharp-edged. If he takes up a part, be sure he will leave his mark upon it. For the rest, he appears to be a "cerebral," as the French say, rather than a "passionate" actor ; better, perhaps, at thinking out a part than at feeling it ; better, certainly, at portraying thought than feeling.

Well, that estimate, it may be said, is of good promise for Hamlet, who is of all tragic protagonists the most thoughtful, who is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, who tells us that nothing is good or bad, but thinking makes it so, whose whole story is that of action paralysed by excess of thought—and who at the same time demands more careful, studious, consecutive thinking-out from the actor than any other character in drama. You are, then, in no way surprised to find Mr. Irving's a pre-eminently intellectual Hamlet. I am not sure that this quality does not attain to what the language of the conventicle calls "intellectual pride."

The student of Wittenberg almost tends at times to become the don. One notes this feature, a certain air of didacticism, in the several passages displaying Hamlet the virtuoso. There is a touch of something like professorial authority in this Hamlet's instruction to the First Player. One thinks less of the Prince of Denmark, a cultivated amateur (with a freedom in criticising "professionals" pardonable in a Royal personage), than of a stage-veteran teaching a novice at the School of Dramatic Art. Hamlet's little lesson to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern on the recorders has a faint flavour of a "demonstration." It would not be altogether out of place on a fashionable Friday night in Albemarle Street. And this Hamlet "lectures" his mother in more senses than one; not merely upbraids her, but has a manifest relish (like any type-character of Mr. Bernard Shaw's) in explaining her to herself. Of course, these elements are all in the play; my point is that they are the elements upon which Mr. Irving's temperament naturally fastens, so that they are brought into somewhat undue prominence. One is a little too conscious of the "cerebral" actor in the full vigour and enjoyment of cerebration. In minor details of "business" whatever thought can do has by Mr. Irving been done. He has thought of shivering all forlorn after the interview with the ghost until Horatio takes off his cloak and wraps it about his friend, who says, affectionately, "Let us go—together." He has thought of sitting by the fire, gazing into the embers, to say "To be or not to be." He has thought of innumerable pauses, breaks, hesitations, to give the hackneyed passages a proper *impromptu* air. He has very carefully thought out the scene of parting with Ophelia—thought out the various fine shades of distinction

between genuine hysteria and melting tenderness (when he supposes they are alone), as well as between feigned madness and unfeigned indignation (when he discovers they are being spied upon). If I speak of melting tenderness I must not be understood to imply that Mr. Irving makes the usual concession in this scene to the sentimentalists. He is, on the whole, fully as harsh to Ophelia as, apparently, Shakespeare meant Hamlet to be.

That brings me to another feature of this Hamlet. I have said that Mr. Irving's temperament is a little hard. Hamlet, too, has, as we all know, his hard side. He says he is cruel only to be kind, but that is rather a self-indulgent statement of the case. He behaved brutally to Polonius during the old man's life, and callously when he put an end to that life. He was, as I have just been saying, terribly harsh to Ophelia. His contempt for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, justifiable enough, was an unnecessarily savage contempt. This hard side of Hamlet comes into especial prominence under Mr. Irving's treatment. He positively bullies Gertrude. He snarls and snaps at the two unhappy youths sent to spy upon him, and at one moment actually slaps Rosencrantz's face. Mr. Irving's humour, too, tends to become sardonic, slightly Mephistophelean. This is Hamlet in part, but only in part. For after all the epithet that finally rings in our ear for Hamlet is "sweet." He is the "sweet Prince," affable, in a few breathing spaces even sunny in mood, and in the long run of a gentle, persuasive charm. It is here that you may like Mr. Irving's Hamlet least. It is an authoritative (not to say a domineering) Hamlet, rather than a Hamlet of winning charm. I have read somewhere or other that he has

tried to profit by a recent exposition we have had of Hamlet's character from the pen of Professor Bradley, who is for an heroic, as against a "sentimental," Prince. Well, I submit that, while an actor may show us Hamlet as "strong" within certain limits, he must at the same time strive to make the strength bring forth sweetness. *Ex fortí dulcedo* should be his motto, and a little more *dulcedo* would certainly do Mr. Irving's Hamlet no harm. He impresses, and that is much; but you wish he would be at a little more pains to seduce. When, however, all is said, one must recognise in this Hamlet a sterling performance. It absorbs the attention, fires the imagination, and satisfies the reason. In the technical qualities of elocution, deportment, presence, and "business" it is a little masterpiece. There are cries from the heart in it which tempt me to reconsider my first judgment that Mr. Irving is not by temperament a "passionate" actor. And in the death scene, if in no other, it does compass the effect I have been speaking of—the effect of captivating charm. On the whole, then, let it stand as a fine achievement, one of the best Hamlets this generation has seen.

## PROFESSOR BRADLEY'S *HAMLET*

IT is often assumed that wrong-headed methods of criticism, like poets, are born, not made. It so happens, however, that of one of these methods it is possible to trace the first rough construction. In 1777 a forgotten Shakespearian commentator, one Maurice Morgann—forgotten, at any rate, until he was exhumed and reprinted in a volume on Eighteenth Century Shakespearian Literature by Mr. Nicol Smith—published what would then have been called an elegant and ingenious *Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff*, wherein the curious may read this passage: “If the characters of Shakespeare are thus whole, and as it were original, while those of almost all other writers are mere imitation, *it may be fit to consider them rather as Historic than Dramatic beings*; and, when occasion requires, to account for their conduct from the whole of character, from general principles, from latent motives, and from policies not avowed.” Here in the words italicised may be noted the first appearance of a heresy that by and by, with the great “Romantic” critics, became something very like an orthodox creed. The strange habit was acquired of considering the personages of Shakespeare’s plays as “historic,” not “dramatic” beings, as actual flesh-and-blood people instead of fictitious inventions. Thus was the distinction ignored between nature and art, realities and appearances. In part, no doubt, the vogue of this

method is to be explained by the circumstances of the "Romantic" epoch. It was the moment of extravagant Shakespeare worship, and a theory of criticism which assigned to Shakespeare the powers of the Divine Creator came exceedingly handy. But we live in different times—times, to be sure, still devoted to the worship of Shakespeare, but with a rationalised substituted for a mystic cult—and one would have thought it almost superfluous to point out the fallacy of a critical method which works on the assumption that a dramatist's characters are real people.

The plain trutn, of course, is that "historic" and "dramatic" beings, to use Morgann's nomenclature, are the resultants of wholly different sets of forces. A real person is the resultant of his will, hereditary circumstances, environment, and millions of causes entirely beyond his control. A dramatist's personage is a mere projection of one man's mind, limited by his powers of observation and imagination, something vague that has been held in solution in the dramatist's consciousness until it is "precipitated" in the form of words written upon paper. It is, as the mathematicians say, a mere "function" of the dramatist, and can utter nothing, think nothing, be nothing outside the range of the dramatist's own nature and mental vision. Now the confusion between the "historic" and the "dramatic" personage is natural enough. The whole art of fiction, particularly the art of drama, with its flesh-and-blood materials, is based upon the possibility of producing this confusion in the reader's or spectator's mind. The confusion gives pleasure, for we seem, by yielding to it, to be witnessing a veritable act of creation and to be enlarging, enriching, vividly colouring our experience of life. But deliberately to import this confusion into

criticism is quite another matter. For it is the object of criticism not to flatter the fancy, but to understand, to trace results to true causes, to see the thing as it really is. If we want to understand the subject of bread we must consider such matters as wheat and flour, mills and ovens; it will not help us in the least, but mislead us, to pretend that bread grows ready-baked in the front garden. And so if we want to understand the play of *Hamlet* we shall not do so by assuming that it is a piece of real life, lived by people who have independent lives outside it. We can only hope to understand it by starting with the simple commonplace truth that it is a work of art contrived by a certain man at a certain time under certain influences and with certain objects. I should apologise for expatiating on the obvious were it not that the old fallacy, the old confusion between reality and art, is still to be met with among our foremost Shakespearian critics. The reason, no doubt, is that, as Morgann put it, Shakespeare is so much greater than the other men that he seems to be different in kind, and not merely in degree—whereas, of course, he is not different in kind, and it is hopelessly uncritical to assume that he works under different conditions from those of other playwrights merely because he does so much better than they do. Yet that assumption constantly vitiates the best work of our Shakespearian commentators. There was Coleridge, for instance, who, unable to reconcile Polonius's foolishness with his sage advice to Laertes when starting for Paris—which would have been irreconcilable had Polonius been a real man—was driven to declare that Polonius was *not* a comic character. Similarly, to account for the inopportune “wassail” speech of Hamlet when waiting for the

Ghost—inopportune, had Hamlet been a real man—Coleridge declares it an attempt on Hamlet's part “to smother the impatience of the moment in abstract reasoning”! Into such absurdities, such deviations from the path of true research, did a wrong theory of criticism lead one of our acutest intellects!

Now I have seen it stated, and I quite agree, that Coleridge has had no such worthy successor as Professor Bradley, author of *Shakespearian Tragedy*. Certainly this is a notable book, always sane and accurate, sometimes profound, a credit to our academic scholarship. It is the last book wherein one would expect to find so unsound a critical method as that which Morgann first indicated and the “Romantic” critics so zealously adopted. Nevertheless the method is there, not overt, but unconscious; there is nearly always the underlying assumption that Hamlet is to be argued about and explained as a real person. Take a few instances. Mr. Bradley combats the view that Hamlet planned the play-scene in the hope that the King would betray his guilt to the Court, by showing, from the text, that his object was to convince himself by the King's agitation that the Ghost had spoken the truth. Then, “It may be well to add that, although Hamlet's own account of his reason for arranging the play-scene may be questioned, it is impossible to suppose that, if his real design had been to provoke an open confession of guilt, he would have been unconscious of this design.” Excellently reasoned—about a real person—but what if Shakespeare was merely fascinated by the dramatic effectiveness of a play within a play, and meant to have that effective scene? Then Hamlet's motives become mere afterthoughts, mere *ficolles*. The assumption that Hamlet is a real person involves search for the reasons

of the play-scene in Hamlet's character ; whereas it is in Shakespeare's dramatic needs of the moment and keen eye for the theatrically effective that the true cause of that play-scene is, I submit, to be found. Again you read that, " Though he (Hamlet) has been disappointed of the throne, everyone shows him respect, and he is the favourite of the people, who are not given to worship philosophers. . . . If he was fond of acting, an æsthetic pursuit, he was equally fond of fencing, an athletic one." Excellent, once more—of a real person. But does it not occur to Professor Bradley that these things are thus merely because Shakespeare wanted (1) a "sympathetic" hero ; (2) an amateur of acting (or what would have become of the play-scene?) ; and (3) a fencer—for the *dénouement*? Further on you read, "Doubtless in happier days he was a close and constant observer of men and manners," and "All his life he had believed in her (Gertrude), we may be sure, as such a son would"—remarks that show Mr. Bradley as unconsciously wandering into speculations about Hamlet as a real person, existing off the stage, and independently of Shakespeare's play. This kind of speculation even pursues him into the discussion of Hamlet's madness : "His adoption of the pretence of madness may well have been due in part to fear of the reality." Might one suggest to Mr. Bradley that Shakespeare, fond, like all the Elizabethan dramatists, of madness as a dramatic *motif*, meant to have "mad scenes" for Hamlet at any cost ; that as he also wanted him for sane actions and speeches, the madness had to be feigned ; and that, nevertheless, when the madness *motif* was being treated on the stage, Shakespeare (as was the custom of his theatre) treated it "for all it was worth," careless of the boundaries between feigning and

reality? I will give only one more instance, a really delicious specimen, of Mr. Bradley's unconscious application of Morgann's method. He is puzzled by the insensibility of the Court after the play-scene. "Everyone," he says, "sees in the play-scene a gross and menacing insult to the King. Yet no one shows any sign of perceiving in it also an accusation of murder. Surely that is strange. Are we, perhaps, meant to understand that they do perceive this, but out of subservience choose to ignore the fact?" Evidently the Professor is serious; evidently he cannot be intentionally parodying the famous explanation of Lord Burleigh's nod. His delightful *naïveté* is merely the result of his considering the Court in *Hamlet* as a real Court, and not a stage-crowd put there to manœuvre in a striking theatrical situation.

Let me not be thought to undervalue the really important part of Mr. Bradley's book, his scrupulously careful examination of the text and his skill in bringing all "into a concatenation accordingly" by means of the text. But to understand Shakespeare you have to supplement examination of the text by consideration of other matters, and it is here that I hold the Professor to be at fault. What is outside the text? He says (by implication) a set of real lives, which have to be divined and reasoned about as we might reason about Napoleon or our second cousins or any other actual person. I say, Shakespeare's dramatic needs of the moment, artistic peculiarities, and available theatrical materials. He would ascribe Hamlet's characteristics of intellectual curiosity, discursiveness, dilettantism to some precedent *état d'âme* in Hamlet himself. I would ascribe them to the fact that Shakespeare himself had these characteristics, and sought expression for them on

the stage without a perpetual solicitude for consistency or intelligibility of character in his mouthpiece. A father is addressing his son starting on a journey. Shakespeare sees the "good things" appropriate to that situation in general, and at once puts them in the mouth of Polonius, though it suits him afterwards to make Polonius a "tedious old fool." The condition of the stage—a platform-stage, a stage of rhetoric, not a stage of illusion, a stage of "turns," rather than of what the old French critics used to call the *liaison des scènes*—permitted this process, which would be altogether out of place on our modern "picture-stage." The fact is, the technique of Elizabethan drama was somewhat in the condition of our contemporary "programme music." Londoners had Richard Strauss conducting his *Symphonia Domestica* at the Queen's Hall the other day. You heard the themes of the father, the mother, and the child. By these the composer gave musical expression to certain moods that were in him, and, as each theme came up, you took it for the pleasure of the moment. So it was with Shakespeare and his audience over *Hamlet*. The theme of the moment was "A Father's Advice to his Son" or "The Art of Acting" or "Meditations on Suicide," and all the dramatic resources of that theme were duly "exploited" on the spot. But the method which Mr. Bradley has inherited from Morgann through Coleridge would lead him to ignore themes in favour of some supposed biographical facts. He would search Dr. Strauss's score for evidence that the baby's eyes were blue or brown. He would say that "The father, we may be sure, sowed his wild oats before marriage," just as he speculates on what Hamlet was like before the curtain goes up.

And yet I do not doubt that he has the root of the

matter in him. Speaking of Hamlet's humour he says: "The truth probably is that it was the kind of humour most natural to Shakespeare himself, and that here, as in some other traits of the poet's greatest creation, we come into close contact with Shakespeare the man." *Brigadier, vous avez raison!* But why, with this clue, the real key to the whole play, does Mr. Bradley persist in discussing Hamlet and his fellows as real, independent existences? Why does he not perceive that Shakespeare "the man" is speaking again and again in the person of Hamlet, whose busy, curious, hedonistic, characteristically Renaissance temperament is the outcome of the dramatist's need for self-expression and of nothing else? What could be more absurd, on any view of Hamlet as a real person, than his sudden recovery from the agonising farewell scene with Ophelia to the calm virtuosity of the instruction to the players? What more baffling than Hamlet's perpetual breaking off from melancholy about his revenge "mission" to indulge in art, in connoisseurship, in an eager cultivation of the *joie de vivre*? Yet take these things for what, as I hold, they are, moods of self-expression, themes in the "programme music," and all difficulty vanishes. To explain Hamlet, or any other stage character, by assuming him to be a real person, and speculating about that part of his life which, on the same hypothesis, exists though we do not see it, is to offer an exact parallel in criticism to the exploit in histrionics of the actor who thought the right way of playing Othello was to black himself all over.

## *MEASURE FOR MEASURE*

(ADELPHI THEATRE, *March 1906*)

THOUGH *Measure for Measure* does not happen to be one of my favourite *livres de chevet*, I would far rather read it than see it played. For in reading one can skip most of the "story part" and all the "comic business" in order to dwell at leisure on the "sentiments" with their fine rhetorical moralising on the great commonplaces of life and death, mercy and justice, passion and chastity. In the theatre, of course, no such process of selection is possible. There the childishness of the plot is thrust under our noses, and the absolutely idiotic behaviour of the Duke is, so to speak, rubbed into us. There the jack-pudding nonsense of Pompey and the appalling tiresomeness of Elbow and the wishy-washy japes of Lucio must be doggedly endured. There, too, one cannot help seeing what a "thin" piece of work is the character of Angelo and what a mere *ficelle* is Mariana. Thus the resultant impression from the acted play is by no means one of unmixed pleasure. We have seen a number of people, very few of whom we can entirely believe in and none of whom we can entirely like. We cannot like a Duke who deserts his post just to see how a substitute will behave in his place—for the reason he himself puts forward about a stricter administration of justice is, of course, too hollow to deceive an infant. We cannot

entirely like so feeble a hero as Claudio. It is not that we necessarily dislike him for clinging to life even at the price of his sister's shame. That is quite human. It is that he has not the courage of that position. We think that he ought to have made out a far better case for a brother's life *versus* a sister's chastity than he actually does. He never pushes his point; he seems a mere drifter. Nor can we entirely like Isabella herself. We feel that she exaggerates the importance of chastity, and we think of more amiable women, essentially as virtuous as she—a Saint Mary of Egypt, a Monna Vanna—who took a saner view. It may be said that to feel like that is to quarrel with the whole *motif* of the play, and that one must concede to Shakespeare the right to adopt the moral view of his time. Of course; but then we do not take the historic standpoint in the theatre, we are subject to the sympathies and antipathies of the moment, and one undoubtedly feels a certain antipathy, along with one's admiration, for this "thing ensky'd and sainted." When Isabella finally pairs off with the Duke, hugging and kissing a man in regard to whom she has previously shown not the slightest symptom of affection, we feel a positive disgust. As to Angelo one might have liked him better, villain as he is, if he had shown a little genuine passion. But though he calls himself a sensualist, he does not offer, so far as I can see, the true characteristics. He is merely coldly and deliberately vicious. Finally, we cannot entirely like Mariana, who lends herself to an unworthy trick in order to secure Angelo for her husband. We do not like these people, and we do not like many of the sentiments which govern their actions. They had what are to us very odd views about marriage, for instance. Marriage made everything right; absence of

"marriage lines" made everything wrong. They had odd views about what the gentleman in *The Mikado* calls "fitting the punishment to the crime." And they had odd views about fun, attaching a value to kicks and thwackings as elements of the humorous which we now consider excessive. Nor can we nowadays share their inordinate zest for Malapropisms. Once more, all these views, of course, have their historical explanation. Everybody knows why Shakespeare held them, and could have held no others. But, once more, in the theatre one is not accounting for the play, or indulging in any mere intellectual exercise; one is seeking the pleasure of the moment, and there are many moments in *Measure for Measure* which are anything but pleasurable.

On the other hand, the one or two great scenes do, of course, profit immensely by stage-representation. There is the great scene wherein Isabella turns with rage and loathing upon Angelo. There is the still greater scene of Isabella's dismay and total *bouleversement* when she finds that her brother clings more to his own life than to his sister's honour. These are two splendid opportunities for the actress who plays Isabella. Does Miss Lily Brayton make the most of them? Well, she makes a great deal of them. She has among her resources beauty, sincerity, "petitionary grace"; she has, too, the art of distinct, sonorous elocution. What she lacks is power. When she reaches what musicians would call the *fff* passages she shows signs of strain, her voice becomes monotonous, she has a tendency to "scold." But hers is a very difficult task. I cannot think at this moment of any ideal Isabella. Miss Brayton's limitations are obvious enough; within them her

intelligence and skill and charm are no less conspicuous. The Claudio of Mr. Harcourt Williams is quite a pretty fellow, a butterfly fluttering helplessly within gloomy prison walls; and I have no objection, for that is quite a tenable view to take of the Claudio of Shakespeare. Mr. Oscar Asche's Angelo is a fine sombre, not to say fuliginous, performance; so far as we can believe in the character at all we can put our faith in Mr. Asche's rendering of it. On the whole a creditable affair, this revival of *Measure for Measure*, and it is by no means through any shortcomings of the players that the dominant impression left on the mind is not altogether one of delight.

## HENRY IRVING IN DANTE

(DRURY LANE, January 1903)

JUST as Mr. Crummles was not a Prussian, so it may be confidently asserted that the average Drury Lane playgoer is not a Dantist. No doubt he is vaguely aware that a long time ago an Italian named Dante Alighieri wrote a poem called *La Divina Commedia*; but he is probably more familiar with Dore's illustrations to this poem than with its text, or even a translation of its text. The famous fresco profile of Dante he cannot fail to have seen. For the rest, modern playwrights have brought him acquainted with the story of Paolo and Francesca da Rimini. Evidently, then, he is not a Dantist. It is necessary to insist upon this point, for the simple reason that the *Dante* which Sir Henry Irving has produced at Drury Lane has been produced, naturally, for the Drury Lane playgoer. It is directly addressed to him; it takes into account his little fraction of knowledge and his very big fraction of ignorance; if the average Drury Lane playgoer believes in it, likes it, and is impressed by it, why, then it has achieved its object.

It is necessary to insist upon this point, because for Dantists, for people who know and love their *Divina Commedia*, the Drury Lane *Dante* will not do at all.

When they are asked, as they are, to swallow the story of an amour—an adulterous amour—between Dante and Pia dei Tolomei, they will at once remark that, where much is uncertain, one thing is quite certain, and that is that Dante had not even a bowing acquaintance with this lady. And for the evidence they will say: see Canto v. of the *Purgatorio*. Further, they will point out that the house of the Malatesta was not at Florence; that the love-story of Bernardino, brother of Francesca da Rimini, and Gemma, daughter of Dante by Pia dei Tolomei, is all nonsense; that it was not Cardinal Colonna who reigned in Avignon; that the several "circles" in the Inferno and Purgatory scenes of the third act are all mixed up, like Sancho Panza's cabbages and baskets; and so forth and so forth. They will say all this, and more. Probably they will invent an additional "circle" in Hell, for the especial benefit of MM. Sardou and Moreau, who have laid sacrilegious hands upon one of the greatest poems in the literature of the world. They say? What do they say? Let them say. *Dante* at Drury Lane is not for them.

The people for whom this *Dante* is intended are, first and foremost, the playgoers—there are legions of them—who have fallen under the spell of Sir Henry Irving's magic personality. Whatever he chooses to play is, they feel, good enough for them. So long as he figures in the foreground of the scene, giving them the postures and the diction and the picturesque presence which they know, they are quite content. Then, again, there are the people to whom drama always appeals on the spectacular side, if on no other; these will get the meat which their soul loveth at Drury Lane. There remain the people—men and brethren, even these, as weak as flesh, if not weaker

(like the celebrated wooden leg)—who cling to the old-fashioned prejudice that a play should be a play; that it should have a strong, continuous, and cumulative dramatic interest. These people will leave Drury Lane not quite so contented as the others. It will be said that the inherent difficulties of the subject made the complete gratification of these people impossible; that neither Sardou nor anybody else could weave episodes from the life of Dante and his great poem into drama pure and simple—drama “in its quiddity,” *dramatic* drama. And the answer is, surely, plain enough. Sardou was not bound to choose this particular subject. Having chosen it, he had two courses open to him. (1) Either he should have handled the poet’s life (or so much as anyone knows of it) and the poet’s text (or so much as he understood of it) faithfully and reverently. The result would have been a set of scenic illustrations to the Divine Comedy *plus* a little (derivative) literature. But to have done that Sardou would have had to be more of a man of letters than he is or ever has been. Or (2) he should have let life and text go, and have invented a brand-new drama of his own. The result might very well have been an excellent play, called (for want of any better name) *Dante*. As a matter of fact, Sardou has tried to blend both methods. He has strung little Dantean episodes, more or less authentic, on a cock-and-bull story of his own invention. The result is a ramshackle, confusing, rather irritating “machine.” While the Dantists will be exasperated, the average playgoer in search of a play will be more than half disappointed. But there is always the scenery, the stupendous mechanical “effects,” the triumphs of stage-management. And there is always Sir Henry Irving.

As for Sir Henry, it is, of course, obvious that if ever man was born to *look* Dante to the life, he is that man. The moment he emerges from the porch of the church at Pisa you recognise the fresco profile. And he wanders through the play—for really he is only a wanderer, a bystander, a perambulating commentator—with just the right air and accent of ascetic severity and melancholy “aloofness.” He seems not to be of common clay—for that matter Sir Henry Irving (even if he be playing Jingle or Macaire) never does. And yet Sardou would have us believe him to be of the commonest clay; he is the lover of Pia dei Tolomei, a married lady, and the father of her child Gemma. No sooner have we learned this than we are interrupted by a hollow groan from a tower-window on the left, at which a gaunt form appears, crying for bread. It is, of course, Count Ugolino. When Dante, horror-stricken, pleads for the starving man’s release, the terrible Archbishop Ruggieri throws the keys of the tower into the river. Dante, enraged, dashes down the Archbishop’s crozier, and is forthwith excommunicated. But he does not quit the scene until he has replied with what may be called a counter curse.

Act I. opens with a glow of colour and sunshine—the springtide fête at Florence. A young painter is at his easel; who could it be but Giotto? A cloaked figure crosses the stage scowling; it is Malatesta, who has moved house from Rimini to Florence. And that fair-haired girl? Gemma, Dante’s daughter, “grown up.” And that cowled monk? Dante himself, the exile returned, in disguise. After an affecting interview between father and daughter (in which Sir Henry reaches an unusual pitch of simple tenderness) a woman’s shriek is heard from Malatesta’s house. The

scene rapidly changes to the interior, and we see Malatesta wiping his bloody sword, and the dead bodies of the lovers half-hidden behind a curtain. In the confusion, Pia's husband, Nello della Pietra, carries off Gemma, pursued by Dante; and the spectator's mind begins to get as confused as the turmoil of the scene.

In Act II. we see the actress (Miss Lena Ashwell), who was Gemma a moment ago, turned to Pia once more. Confusion worse confounded! As Pia she dies in the foul air of the marshes, and immediately reappears as Gemma in the convent of San Pietro. Comic business (rather ignoble) of quarrelling nuns; a touch of Boccaccio rather than of Dante, but a vulgarised Boccaccio. Enter Dante and Bernardino, leading a rescue party. Dante, hiding with Gemma behind the arras, nearly suffers the fate of Polonius. The sword of one of the soldiery, probing the arras, has pierced his side, and he is left for dead on the floor.

But in Act III. he is alive again, mourning over the tomb of Beatrice in the Campo Santo at Florence. His old love appears to him in a vision, and bids him, if he would find Gemma (who has again, it seems, been carried off), visit the Nether World, and ascertain the girl's whereabouts from the spirit of her mother, Pia. So said, so done. Virgil—practically a *persona muta*—promptly appears, and conducts Dante to the Door of Hell, past the Fiery Graves (interview with Ruggieri), through the Circle of Ice (interview with Ugolino and Nello della Pietra), on towards the bridge of Rocks (interview with Pia), and finally to the Valley of Asphodels. These various interviews result in the simple piece of information that Gemma has fled with

Bernardino to Avignon. Needless to say that all the Infernal and Purgatorial "circles" are triumphs of scenic weirdness.

Finally (Act IV.) Dante arrives at Avignon, where the man who ought to be a Pope, but is (in deference, it is said, to certain susceptibilities) only a Cardinal Legate, has just condemned Gemma and Bernardino to the stake. But Dante tells him that his own hour has come—and tells him so in one of the finest declamations of the play. At the stroke of six down falls the Cardinal Legate a dead man. Bernardino and Gemma are saved.

Was this rather puerile story of the hairbreadth escapes of Gemma and Bernardino (with Dante to the rescue) worth inventing? Could not some real poet have contrived a worthier scenic arrangement of the Dante legend which might still have exhibited Sir Henry Irving on every side of his remarkable personality? I think that a quite possible achievement.

## WESTMINSTER ABBEY

(FRIDAY, October 20, 1905)

TO-DAY the dust that was Henry Irving is enshrined at Westminster. Henceforth he is a name, a tradition, a legend. Like all who, in Buffon's phrase, *parlent au corps par le corps*, the stage-player, if our eyes cannot see him nor our ears hear him, is as nothing. We may dispute among ourselves over his exact rank, and ransack our dictionaries for names to call him by; but just what the actor was, just what he did for us who saw and heard him, we cannot create again by words. What remains of Betterton? A few pages of Steele and Colley Cibber. What of Edmund Kean? An essay or two of Hazlitt. But these are mere printed signs; not the warm, pulsing, radiating forces that were Betterton and Kean. To read of dead actors, when all is said, is to learn nothing more than that our forefathers were pleased; it is not to share their pleasure. It will be—it is already—thus with Henry Irving. Catalogues of plays and characters, dates of this and that occurrence, reams of comment—what have all these to do with the thrills of pleasure we have had from the actual presence of the living man? This, the eternal commonplace of all acting, is peculiarly true of such acting as Henry Irving's. The player of ductile, fluid temperament, who sinks himself in his part, who is a born mime—as Diderot said of Garrick,

*naturellement singe*—is never so utter a loss as the player whose virtue is his own peculiar personality. The finest thing—not seldom the only fine thing—in any stage-character of Irving's was Irving himself. And so it is an effort to recall the details of his playing—how he emphasised this, with what gesture or “business” he illustrated that—but what the man was in his totality, as he stood there before us, can still be felt in every fibre of our being.

And that, no doubt, is why, as one lets one's mind range over recollections of the man during the past quarter of a century, one finds oneself thinking most naturally, and most affectionately, not of any particular one of his stage-impersonations, but of his look and manner and speech at the moment he used to come before the curtain to return thanks to the cheering audience. The dignity and grace and sweetness of it! The last time I saw him, and was ever to see him, only a few months ago at Drury Lane, there had been such a night of enthusiasm as I should think must be rare in the annals of the theatre. Even the actor seemed caught by the emotion of the public, for his voice faltered a little as, in his customary formula, he professed himself their obliged, respectful, loving servant. An unforgettable scene.

That was Irving's secret, a personal domination. He never charmed by mere beauty or amazed by mere skill; one was simply fascinated, subjugated by the man himself. The influence of personality, despite the investigations of Psychical Researchers, still remains a mystery. We call it, by analogy, “magnetism”; but how it really operates we cannot explain. If, however, we cannot explain it we may say of it what Johnson said of something else: “We *know* what it is, Sir,

and there's an end on't." We know that some men have it, while others have it not. The great teachers—a Socrates, a Dr. Arnold, a Jowett—were great because of it, not because of what they taught. In art, and that the very highest, it is often absent. The poet, the painter, the musician may dispense with it; their works, to be sure, are emanations of themselves, but not the emanation that we mean by personal magnetism. It is permissible to conjecture that Shakespeare was without it, or else we may be sure we should have heard more about him from his contemporaries. But to the histrionic artist it is indispensable. In Irving this gift of personal domination was so great as occasionally to swamp the play. Whatever part he impersonated was bound to become the very centre and core of the whole. His Iago would overtop another man's Othello; his Malvolio became the protagonist of *Twelfth Night*, his Jingle the hero of *Pickwick*; his Mathias in *The Bells*, compared, say, with the more orthodox Mathias of M. Coquelin, was as a mountain to a molehill. There was a native grandeur in the man, so that even his very villains, his Macaires, and the other parts he adopted from the repertory of Frederick Lemaître, became gorgeous, flamboyant, *quasi-regal* in their villainy. When, after his early struggles, he "found himself," it was always to find himself in a part of personal domination—a Charles I., a Richelieu, a Wolsey, a Becket. He instinctively turned to playing leaders of men because he was a leader of men. As a manager he had a Napoleonic faculty for organisation and command; as a *metteur-en-scène* he could not help doing everything "in the grand style." He was not content until he had enlisted the first archæologists and painters and

musicians of the day in the service of the theatre. All he did was done with a certain magnificence.

The followers of his profession do well to honour him to-day, for it was he who vindicated the dignity of that profession, insisting upon the actor's right to respect off the stage as well as on it—*in republica* (the quotation was once used about Irving himself by Lord Coleridge) *tanquam in scena*. Macready had been ashamed of his calling. Irving was proud of it, and felt a stain on its honour “like a wound.” It is true that he did more for his fellow-players than for the playwrights of his day. But how could it be otherwise? How could this strange and picturesque figure, this hidalgo, this living “old master,” descend, without a touch of incongruity, to our modern “coat-and-waistcoat” pieces of everyday realism? No, his appointed place was in the world of romance, the world of Renaissance palaces, Illyrian shores, groves of cedar and cypress in Messina, Rosamond’s maze, the battlements of Elsinore. But one must not stray at this moment into criticism, or reservations of any sort. To-day there is only one sad word to say—Farewell to our obliged, respectful loving servant.

## A. W. PINERO

### *IRIS*

(GARRICK THEATRE, September 1901)

THERE is a sense—not strictly accurate, but permissible, perhaps, by “extension”—in which Mr. Pinero’s *Iris*, together with *Mrs. Tanqueray* and *Mrs. Ebbsmith* and *The Benefit of the Doubt*, may be said to form a tetralogy. These four plays are bound together, not by any continuity of story, but by identity of theme. Each portrays an erring woman and her fate. The woman’s fate is, of course, the *dénouement* of the play; and it has always seemed hitherto that in his *dénouements* was to be found Mr. Pinero’s weak point. They were apt to be arbitrary or to shirk logical results. Paula Tanqueray committed suicide, and sudden death is a cheap plot-solution; not so cheap, however, as the “whitewashing” of Agnes Ebbsmith and Theophila Fraser by the aid, spiritual or social, of the Anglican Church. In *Iris* Mr. Pinero, for the first time, does not shrink from a real *dénouement*. And it must have cost him much to nerve himself to it. For the *dénouement* of *Iris* overwhelms the spectator with horror. There is hardly room for pity. Indeed, there are no tears throughout the piece, save the *lacrymæ rerum*. Further, although the *dénouement* is felt to be exactly right, the spectator

does not foresee it. At no step in the play does one foresee the next step, and yet, so soon as anything has happened, one feels that it must have happened and just in that way. This means, of course, what everybody knew already, that Mr. Pinero has at least one quality of the born dramatist, the art of stimulating curiosity, of stimulating it to a degree wherein it becomes almost gnawing anxiety, and then of satisfying it to the full.

One more point of comparison with the three other plays of what I have very loosely called Mr. Pinero's tetralogy. They have each dealt with women of strongly marked characters, women whose wills were active forces. Paula was headstrong and perverse, Agnes steadily determined, Theophila rash. And this choice was all to Mr. Pinero's advantage, because will is the very stuff out of which drama is made. But here, in *Iris*, he has set himself a far harder task. For Iris Bellamy is will-less, or, what comes to the same thing, has a constantly divided will. At the crisis of her fortunes she has to choose, as she puts it herself, between recklessness and self-denial. But she has neither the courage for the one nor the firmness for the other; her character is too weak. And in the penalty she pays for her weakness lies the tragedy of the play. She knows her own weakness of will, this rich young widow, and also her love of luxury. So, too, presumably did her late husband when he left a will forbidding her to remarry on pain of losing her fortune. We hear of that will at the rise of the curtain, and are consequently not surprised to find ourselves at once confronted with two suitors for her hand, Mr. Laurence Trenwith and Mr. Frederick Maldonado. Mr. Trenwith has youth, all the graces, and no money. He could

only offer his bride a log-hut in British Columbia. Mr. Maldonado is a burly, aggressive Jew; but he is also a millionaire. Of course, Iris loves Trenwith; but she cannot face poverty, and, to save herself from her lover, hastily accepts Maldonado. Hardly has she told Trenwith of this step when she begins to repent, and whispers to him to come back to the house that night after the others have left. When he returns she finds she has not the strength to part with him, gives him a note for Maldonado breaking off her engagement, and falls into his arms. This first act has been most adroitly conducted. By a novel device of dropping the curtain for a few seconds at a time, so as to divide the evening into three "episodes," it has shown us Iris's nature, her embarrassing situation between the two men, and the characters of those men—Trenwith's simple, sincere, rather docile; Maldonado's fierce, violent, almost volcanic. It is evident from the first that there is going to be trouble with Maldonado.

In the second and third acts we are at Cadenabbia, where Iris and Trenwith are living "for climate and the affections," to a mandoline accompaniment. But already there is a little rift within the mandoline. Trenwith has his livelihood to earn; he cannot live on Iris's money; he is resolved to depart for British Columbia, and begs Iris to come out there and be married to him, poverty notwithstanding. She cannot consent to beggar herself; and yet in a few moments, and in a wholly unlooked-for way, beggared she is. The newspapers, just arrived from England, tell her that her solicitor and trustee has gambled away the whole of her fortune. At this juncture the spectator instinctively looks round for Maldonado—who promptly appears. At first Iris takes her misfortune bravely;

it seems to brace her up. Though she declines to go out straightway with Trenwith to British Columbia, for fear she should be a burden to him, she promises to wait patiently for him until he can see his way to keeping a wife, say in two or three years, when he is to return to claim her. The lovers part, after a harrowing scene—a scene of astonishing truth in every detail, a scene which shows that Mr. Pinero draws from life and not from the stage—and Maldonado, who has become effusively cordial, sees Trenwith on his journey. Then the “episodic curtain” is again employed, and we are shown Maldonado’s return to the villa to wish Iris good-bye. She is going away to live on the wretched £150 a year which has been saved from the wreck of her fortune; and when Maldonado offers her a cheque-book, saying he has opened a small account in her name upon which he trusts she will draw in an emergency, she has the courage to refuse. He leaves the book behind him, however, and in a few moments, to do an act of kindness to a young girl, Iris finds herself automatically drawing a cheque. And, as the curtain descends on the third act, she quietly drops the cheque-book into her travelling bag.

When the curtain again rises, two years have elapsed, and we are at a gorgeous flat in Mayfair, where Iris is “discovered” richly dressed, but pale and haggard, with a grey forelock like Signora Duse’s. (And, by the way, what a part for Signora Duse!) A man enters, and the spectator knows very well who that man will be—Maldonado, of course, now a brutal tyrant. His plot has succeeded, and, taking advantage of the woman’s poverty and weakness—a painful story, told in a confession, too long for narration here—he has had his revenge. Even now, however, he would marry

the woman, who, dazed, terrified, a sullen slave, says she will "think it over." But the inevitable happens. Trenwith, who knows nothing (or only that Iris's letters have unaccountably ceased), returns to claim his bride. The savage irony of this situation is too terrible for tears, and it is in something akin to torture that you follow the scene in which the wretched woman tells her old lover the truth. Stunned by the blow, he can only mutter, "I am sorry, I am sorry." She begs him to return to her; was not her first fault committed through love of him? But he only mutters, "I am sorry, I am sorry," as he staggers from the room. Then swiftly comes the woman's fate. Maldonado, in hiding, has overheard everything, and knows that he was not Iris's first lover. In his blind fury he almost strangles her. But he calms down; he comes of a race, he says, whose qualities are curiously blended—made up partly of passion, partly of prudence; and now he will have done with passion. Whereupon, he turns Iris out of the house—shouting, "This is your punishment; to drift back into the condition in which I found you a few months since; this is your reward"—and is last seen, as the curtain comes down, madly sweeping the china from the mantelpiece and smashing the furniture—the wild beast in him, the *bête à quatre pattes*, let loose.

*Iris* is a very powerful, very painful, play, a characteristic specimen of Mr. Pinero's art, a piece of literature and at the same time a piece of solid, living, throbbing drama.

## *LETTY*

(DUKE OF YORK'S, October 1903)

IN *Letty* Mr. Pinero reverts to an earlier manner. It is a play of incident and character—that is to say, it just tells you a story for the story's sake—it is not a contribution to the “drama of ideas.” I do not, of course, mean that it is “unidea'd.” By no means; it may even be said to have its little thesis, just as every baby in *Utopia Limited* had “its little prospectus.” But the little thesis is quite unpretentious; it has almost the air of an afterthought, of a mere curtain “tag.” It is better to resign yourself to orthodox domesticity in your own humble station in life than to sell your peace of mind for a career of “guilty splendour.” It would have been better for Emma Bovary had she reconciled herself to a placid, if humdrum, existence with Charles. Quite so. It is a thesis, as the French say, “like another,” if as a thesis it “do not over-stimulate.” But it is not to be supposed that the thesis of *Letty* is the element in the play with which Mr. Pinero has been at all seriously concerned. His chief aim has been to tell us a straightforward story for its own sake; to embody for us in a dramatic form what in the cant phrase is called “knowledge of the human heart”; and his aim has been fully realised. *Letty* is not a great, but it is an extremely interesting, play.

Letty is a clerk in a "bucket-shop," who has made the acquaintance of a "swell," Nevill Letchmere, and in her timid and fluttering little heart cherishes the hope that he means to marry her. She is a good little girl, and never visits a gentleman's rooms unless chaperoned by her comrades Hilda and Marion. The three girls have come to Letchmere's flat in Grafton Street to celebrate Letty's birthday, and are making merry over cake and wine when they are interrupted by the entrance of Bernard Mandeville, Letty's employer. Mandeville is a "bounder," but he is prepared to marry Letty, and comes to bid Letchmere "keep off the grass." For Letchmere, as he points out, is only spoiling the girl's chances, seeing that there is somewhere or other a Mrs. Letchmere. The Letchmeres have "separated by mutual disagreement." For a man about town Letchmere is remarkably sententious and didactic; but simple little Letty is fascinated by his fine language, as well as by his fine furniture. She yearns for romance, for luxury, for a life in which people do not drop their "h's"—or preach the Gospel of Work, like Marion, or like Hilda, talk of "chaps" and gorge themselves on tinned lobster and bottled stout. Oh, Emma Bovary! Letchmere obtains permission to follow the girls to their lodgings. He has something important to say to Letty—alone. Something important? Letty is in the seventh heaven of feverish anticipation. She thinks she knows what Letchmere will have to say to her. She does not know there is a Mrs. Letchmere. And that is the first act.

Act II. passes on the roof—in a humble sort of way the roof-garden—of a house in Langham Street. The girls are giving a little party to some men of their own

set, a commercial traveller, an insurance agent, and a photographer. Please observe the photographer, because he is more important than he looks. He is a good little fellow, with a passion for flowery language. Mr. Pinero gets a great deal of fun out of these three men; honest, unsophisticated fun. The traveller is jocular, the insurance agent lugubrious, the photographer flowery. They propitiate Letty with gifts of sausage-rolls and the other comic "properties" of the stage. Altogether a gay little (and rather Middle Victorian) roof-garden. But Letty's whole soul revolts from the sordid vulgarity of her surroundings—as symbolised by sausage-rolls. Will Letchmere never come? Come at last he does, but only to shatter poor Letty's dream. He cannot marry her; his acquaintance is only doing her harm; on the whole she had better make up her mind to marry Mandeville. While she is still reeling under the shock Mandeville himself arrives, and duly makes his offer of marriage. At first the girl turns from him with loathing. But she is in debt and she is ill; Mandeville dangles a victoria before her eyes and the delights of Trouville. Half beside herself Letty accepts him, and the whole party sets off for an evening out at the Alhambra. And that is the second act.

In the third act we are in a *cabinet particulier* at the Café Régence. Three people are over their coffee and cigarettes after dinner—Letchmere, his sister, Mrs. Ivor Crosbie, and his sister's admirer, Coppinger Drake, to whom she is about to say good-bye. She has a brute of a husband, and Drake would like nothing better than to elope with her, but Letchmere hopes to keep one respectable member in the family, and determines that the "good-bye" between his sister and her admirer

shall be final. The farewell is duly taken, and then the room is suddenly filled by the other party, Mandeville, Letty, and the rest, who have come on to supper from the Alhambra. Details of a "spread" with a wonderful *consommé*, a sole *Dieppoise*, and innumerable bottles of Moet 1892. More comic business from the traveller, the insurance agent, and the photographer; comic insolence from Mandeville; comic vulgarity from Hilda. But Letty's position is terrible. Letchmere has remained behind, and is compelled to endure the sight of Mandeville's outrageous behaviour. The girl's agony comes to an unendurable pitch when Mandeville, filled with Moet 1892, assaults the proprietor of the restaurant. "You will never be able to stand life with this man," says Letchmere. "Come to my rooms to-night, and see if we can try another plan." And that is the third act.

In Letchmere's flat, at midnight, with her spirit utterly crushed, Letty gives up the struggle. The pair map out a Continental tour—Venice in the moonlight, a new hat every day, and *la joie de vivre, ohé ohé!* But a message arrives from Letchmere's sister. She has "bolted" with Drake after all. Letchmere cannot forgive himself. If he had escorted his sister home as he had promised, instead of staying behind at the restaurant with Letty and her friends, the mischief would not have happened. A woman has fallen, and a woman whom he could have saved. "Then save a woman now," says Letty, in a revulsion of feeling, "be kind to me; let me go home." And he lets her go—and that is the fourth act.

An epilogue shows what has happened to all the parties after an interval of a couple of years. Letty

has married the photographer. Emma Bovary has settled down half-contentedly with Charles. Marion and the ex-insurance agent help in the business. Hilda has gone on the stage. Drake has married the woman he ran away with, and turns out as unsatisfactory a husband as her first. Letchmere is in a consumption, marked for death. Letty's last word to him is "Thanks." She thanks him for having saved her for a reasonable marriage in her own station. The photographer is "funny," she knows, but good. And she has her baby. It is not until Letchmere has left the room that her face drops. She cannot forget.

It is, then, a story-play, but the story has no dull moments, and the play is admirably played. Miss Irene Vanbrugh's picture of the weak, romantic, timid, loving little heroine is a picture not to be forgotten. The girl is, as one of the people says in the play, "alive all over." That is the prime quality of Miss Irene Vanbrugh's acting; it is always alive, alive all over. Mr. Irving, too, is very good, making a really fine thing of his dramatic scene in the fourth act; but he is a little too solemn. Some of his speeches in Grafton Street are delivered as it were *ex cathedra*, in the style of a lecture at the Royal Institution round the corner. The fault is partly Mr. Pinero's, who is too fond of making Letchmere (and not only Letchmere) "talk like a book."

This matter of Mr. Pinero's dialogue is worth looking into: for it is a question in which, of course, not only the drama is concerned, but all literature and, indeed, the daily commerce of practical life. It would seem as though nearly all writers—and absolutely all those who are learning to write—are in deadly terror

of being caught writing just as they would naturally talk. And many of them, no doubt, have this justification, that they talk badly. But, in point of fact, they are just as much afraid of what is simple and fresh and direct in their talk as they are of what is slipshod or slangy. When the sporting reporter of a bygone generation wrote of "Old Sol" or "Jupiter Pluvius," he was making a concession to what he supposed in a vague sort of way to be the dignity of literature; he rejected the words "sun" and "rain," because these were the words that he would use in the bosom of his family—they were not fit for "company." You have the same feeling at work in the Asiatic prose of the auctioneer's rostrum, the feeling that you must put on fine language as you put on a fine coat, for public display. Mr. Borthrop Trumbull in *Middle-march* is the great exemplar of auctioneer English. Trumbullism, if one may coin a word, is one of the strongest and most persistent forces in literature. At its best it is, of course, a very fine thing—as we can all see when we take up *Rasselas* or *The Decline and Fall*, or *Vathek*. At its worst it is the abomination of desolation—the horrible jargon of the East End melodrama and the penny novelette on the one hand, and the equally horrible jargon, on the other, of the "precious" critic and the Dellacruscan essayist. In the one case as in the other it is an attempt to disguise something of which the writer is, perhaps foolishly, ashamed. He feels that his natural self will not bear inspection. "An underbred, fine-spoken fellow was he"—in his first epithet Goldsmith hit the real offence of Trumbullism.

Are we to maintain, then, that the best literature is always modelled on the best conversation? Are we

to condemn by implication, the vast—and in English literature peculiarly rich—field of ornate or “chiselled” or idiosyncratic prose? That would be a foolhardy enterprise, indeed, in a generation which is still under the spell of Ruskin and Meredith and Pater and Stevenson. Non-natural prose may have nothing to do with what I have called Trumbullism; far from being a cloak for the *mauvaise honte* of inferiority, it may be the inevitable expression of majestic supremacy, of transcendent genius. But the fact remains that a delicate and fastidious feeling for *realism* in language is an extremely rare thing. It is as rare in the world of affairs as it is in the world of art. Anyone who read, for instance, a recently published correspondence between the Prime Minister and the Duke of Devonshire must have seen that Mr. Balfour has this rare feeling to his finger-tips, while the Duke has it not at all. Though the Duke wrote a dignified letter, it was not a letter couched in language which a duke or any man would naturally speak; but Mr. Balfour replied in the exact tone of one man of parts and breeding conversing with another. Strangely enough, the rarity of this particular feeling for language is most conspicuous just where it is most disastrous—in the dialogue of the stage. Whatever may be said as regards other departments of literature, absolute realism of language is indispensable in a play of contemporary life. Yet many of the foremost modern dramatists have been curiously deficient in it. I say “modern dramatists,” because accurate realism of language was not expected in the old or rhetorical theatre, and would, indeed, have been out of place there. The theory of that theatre was that the personages of the play, while ostensibly talking to

one another, were really talking *at* the audience. The public came to hear them make speeches—"in character," to be sure—but to hear them make speeches. Modern drama is based upon the theory that the audience "overhears" the conversation of the people on the stage. Yet how many even among first-rate dramatists have attained this ideal of absolutely realistic language, the exact tone of conversation "overheard"? Dumas *fils* conspicuously failed in this. Even Ibsen's language—heresy though it may be to say so—often strikes one as unnatural. The fault has sometimes been laid at the door of his English translators—unjustly, however, for I find Edmond de Goncourt noting in the French translation precisely the same characteristic, the excess of "mots livresques," the habit of "talking like a book." De Goncourt, by the way, claimed to be himself the inventor of the true stage dialogue—what he called "*la langue littéraire parlée.*" Whatever we may think of his claim, we may take his phrase as an excellent definition. Stage language should always be "literary"—*i.e.* the outcome of design, selection, rejection, arrangement to an artistic end; but it should always be "spoken" language—*i.e.* selected from the repertory of natural, colloquial, appropriate speech.

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and this feeling for natural, appropriate speech has been denied to many of our best playwrights. Mr. Barrie has it; but who else? Certainly not the author of *Letty*. In the main arts of the playwright, the art of character-building and the art of story-telling, Mr. Pinero is without a rival. But I am not discussing Mr. Pinero's total equipment for dramatic work; I content myself with pointing out a curious defect in

that equipment—the lack of a nice feeling for realism in language. The defect is a curious one, because it is evident that Mr. Pinero is fully alive to the whims and humours of eccentric character as exhibited in speech. Unlike many of his *confrères*, he is no mere floundering Trumbullist. Sometimes, to be sure, he will Trumbullise deliberately and for the fun of the thing—as in the flowery periods of his comic photographer. That character is conceived in a vein of playful exaggeration, and the language assigned to it is quite conceivably appropriate. So, when he deals with a vulgar personage, like the shop-girl Hilda, he can make that character, too, talk with quite appropriate vulgarity. But what man about town ever talked like his hero, Nevill Letchmere? Listen to Nevill describing an “outside stockbroker” in a quiet *tête-à-tête* with his sister:—

“An arrant brigand, thriving mainly upon the shame-faced gambling propensities of the respectable classes. The credulous parson, the sanguine widow, and the struggling professional man are his chief victims—although his transactions are occasionally spiced by a soiled flimsy from an adventurous *demi-mondaine*.”

Note how each substantive gets its adjective—the parson is “credulous,” the widow “sanguine,” and so on—and the stiff vocabulary—“transactions,” “*demi-mondaine*.” This is not conversation; it is “spouting.” A few lines lower you read:—

“The austere Marion shares a stuffy lodging in the most depressing locality conceivable.”

Obviously Nevill would never have used the last three words; they belong to the comic photographer.

When Letty faints, in the same scene, Nevill blandly remarks :—

“The heat in this room is insufferable. My man must have neglected to lower the sun-blinds.”

This, as a speech obviously without ironical intention, is *impayable*. At first you may have thought that in assigning this stilted, bookish language to Nevill Letchmere, Mr. Pinero had the deliberate design of portraying character; that he wished to make Nevill a prig, after the pattern of the young prig (played by the same actor) in *The Princess and the Butterfly*. But nothing in the subsequent development of the character serves to justify this view, and you abandon it when you find that not only the hero spouts, but the heroine as well. Here is a speech which Letty makes to two girl-friends :—

“To my imperfect intelligence, it seems that the first essential is to be capable of resigning oneself to a scheme of things which ordains that some women shall spend their lives in perpetual fag, while others—our more fortunate sisters as they are styled—enjoy freedom and luxury galore. . . .”

There is no need to labour the point further. That word “galore” settles it.

## *HIS HOUSE IN ORDER*

(ST. JAMES'S, February 1900)

WHEN Mr. Pinero is at his best you may reckon yourself as close upon the high-water mark of theatrical enjoyment. In *His House in Order* he is at his very best. His master quality, by which I mean the quality specifically called "dramatic," is here seen at its *maximum* of energy. This or that playwright may show more "heart" than Mr. Pinero or a more delicate subtlety, a third may easily outclass him in intellectual gymnastic, but in his command of the resources of the stage for the legitimate purposes of the stage he is without a rival. The art of drama is, quintessentially, the art of story-telling, as the sculptors say, "in the round." Mr. Pinero is supreme as a story-teller of that sort. We are always keenly interested in what his people are doing at the moment; we always have the liveliest curiosity about what they are going to do a moment later. He knows it is the dramatist's main business to "get along," and he gets along in *His House in Order* at a "record" pace. The play tells a plain tale plainly, with the directness of a novel of Defoe; there are no suspensions, no digressions. It displays a richly comic invention, it culminates in a situation of tremendous seriousness, it reveals that quasi-classic element of drama the "purging" of a will, and it has a perpetual undertone of almost

mocking irony. Not, of course, that this work, any more than any other work, is flawless. Mr. Pinero, though he has subdued, has not completely conquered his weakness for talking like a book. And there is one passage which seems to suggest that he has neglected Johnson's advice to Boswell to "clear his mind of cant." But, take it for all in all, *His House in Order* is a very choice specimen of Pinero work; in other words a play yielding the highest possible measure of delight.

Distaste for the obvious must not deter me from saying what will be said by everyone—that the play ought to have been called *The Second Mrs. Jesson*. That title, indeed, would be far more appropriate for the new play than was *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* for the old. I mean that in the earlier play the contrast between the first and second wife, though indicated, was not worked out; whereas that contrast may be said to be the main *motif* of the new play. The character of the first Mrs. Tanqueray had no bearing on the fortunes of the second. The stern lady "with marble arms" was dead, and there, dramatically, was an end of her. But the first Mrs. Jesson, though dead, may be said in a sense to be a protagonist in *His House in Order*; the cult of her memory is what the mathematicians call an "effective force" in the action; she suffers, posthumously, a change of character which determines the fortunes of the living people in the play. More than that, the evolution in the character of the first wife determines, as by a mathematical law, the evolution of character in the second. It is a case of "contrary motion." When wife No. 1 is morally "up," wife No. 2 is morally "down"—I do not mean merely seems to others, by dint of contrast, but really

is an inferior creature. When, through a sudden discovery, wife No. 1 sinks as low as she formerly stood high, wife No. 2 goes up like a rocket—again I do not mean merely in the opinion of the rest, but she actually *becomes* a superior creature. And the very discovery which reveals the inferiority of the dead woman is the means by which the living woman finds her own better self. There is a symmetry about this scheme which should captivate the geometrician in us; it has the “elegance” of a theorem by Housel or Chasles. But it must not be supposed that there is anything so arid as formal geometry, any suspicion of a blackboard demonstration, in the way Mr. Pinero tells his story.

Act I. A journalist who has come to “interview” Mr. Filmer Jesson, M.P. for a Midland county division, on the occasion of his opening a new park, presented to the neighbouring town in memory of his deceased wife Annabel, has a preliminary talk with the M.P.’s private secretary, which is the means of at once bringing the audience acquainted with the names and relationship of all the people in the play. The ceremony is to be graced by the presence of the Ridgeleys, father and mother, brother and sister, of the deceased lady. Geraldine Ridgeley, the sister, is a permanent inmate of the house; is, in fact, its martinet ruler. Then there is little Derek Jesson, the son, and Major Maurewarde, an old friend of the Jesson family. Finally, there is Hilary Jesson, Filmer’s elder brother, a diplomat on leave. But, asks the reporter, have you not forgotten the present Mrs. Jesson? Oh yes, to be sure! We see at once that Nina, the present Mrs. Jesson, counts for nothing in the establishment. A conversation between Filmer and his brother Hilary

soon tells us why. Filmer is a prig, whose watchwords are method and order; rigid "correctness" is his fetish. The late Mrs. Jesson lived up to his ideals in these matters; his present wife merely exists to outrage them. In a moment of impulse he has married his child's governess, a clergyman's daughter (note that detail, please), and finds he has made a mistake. Nina smokes cigarettes, brings her dogs into the drawing-room, and is absolutely deficient in those qualities of order which illustrated her dead predecessor. But order is essential to Filmer, and so he has had to call in the dead lady's sister to restore it. Hilary, who has a marked talent for preaching, which, as we shall soon find, is apt to get the better of him, advances the thesis that we should take women as we find 'em, God bless 'em, and not ask from one the virtues special to another. All very well for you, a bachelor, with an easy temper, is Filmer's contemptuous reply. Presently Hilary gets a *tête-à-tête* with Nina, and learns her side of the story. She recognises her deficiencies, and would have tried to mend them if only she had had a little encouragement. But the Ridgeleys coldly snub her, and have the ear of her husband. The worship of Annabel has got on Nina's nerves. Treated as a naughty child she can only behave as one. Hilary listens sympathetically; and the pair forthwith become fast friends.

In Act II. we make the acquaintance of the Ridgeley family: old Sir Daniel a pompous bore, Lady Ridgeley a dragon, Pryce Ridgeley a solemn ass. Geraldine Ridgeley, the *de facto* ruler of the household, we have already seen. These, with Filmer Jesson, constitute what Nina calls the Society of Annabel Worshippers. Hilary advises her, for the sake of

domestic harmony, to join that society, and she promises to try. An opportunity occurs over the question of the memorial park. There is a suggestion of adding a bandstand (rejected by the Ridgeley family because open-air music is un-English) or a fountain. Nina begs to be allowed to contribute a fountain, an artistic fountain. Artistic fountains are also vetoed as un-English—and Nina flounces out of the room in a rage. Hilary seizes the opportunity to recite to the puzzled Ridgeleys a rather too lengthy apologue about a French cook who succeeded another French cook and, because of unfavourable comparison, blew up the kitchen boiler. Nina returns, and apologises for her misbehaviour. But the discovery that Annabel's boudoir, reopened to-day for the first time after its owner's death, is to be allotted to little Derek instead of to herself provokes a more serious outburst of anger. She flatly declines to attend the opening ceremony at the park on the morrow, and is in open revolt. The Ridgeleys throughout this act have been extremely droll. Master Derek has shown himself a charming little boy, and (again, please note) there is an extraordinarily warm affection between him and Major Maurewarde.

Act III. Nina still in full rev<sup>nt</sup>. She defiantly puts on a dress of flaming red, just to scandalise the Ridgeleys, who are all in deep black to celebrate the third anniversary of Annabel's death. To Hilary's friendly remonstrances she turns a deaf ear; with her husband she declares open war. And then, at the moment when Nina's case is touching bottom, comes the great discovery. Little Derek, rummaging in his dead mother's boudoir, has unearthed a handbag from a "secret" drawer. Nina unsuspectingly opens it—and

finds some faded letters from Maurewarde to Annabel. These letters show that Annabel, far from being a saint, was Maurewarde's mistress and that Derek is his child. Annabel was on the point of eloping with Maurewarde when she met her death in a carriage accident. So now the tables are turned! Nina has it in her power to dethrone the sacred image of Annabel, and to humiliate the tyrannical Ridgeleys. She means, she tells Hilary, to use her power. But Hilary also has *his* power, the power of preaching, and he uses—indeed, abuses—it. Let her think of Annabel, her remorse, her misery. Why, interjects Nina, she was on the point of eloping when she met her death! Just so, replies Hilary; do you not (being a clergyman's daughter) there recognise the hand of God? And he appeals to her "belief in the doctrine of Divine interposition in the ordinary affairs of life." I just quote that phrase—I might quote many more—to support the statement that Mr. Pinero has not yet got over his weakness for talking like a book. But Hilary's reference to the "hand of God" in the carriage accident is an instance of a less venial weakness; it is the lapse, to which I have already alluded, into cant. Hilary is represented as a sensible man of the world, not a fool. Why then is he made to put forward the singular theory of a God who ignores clandestine adultery but intervenes when the secret sin threatens to become an open scandal? And it is done so seriously, with so evident a bid for our "sympathy"! Mr. Pinero should have given us some little sign, at least, to make it clear that he is not the dupe of his own sophistry. Anyhow, he puts a sensible reply into Nina's mouth: "Oh, yes, and it was also the hand of God that brought the letters to light and delivered them to me." Thereupon

Hilary tries another tack, and this time a successful one. The really heroic people are the people who have learnt to renounce. "Nina, be among those who wear the halo. Burn Maurewarde's letters, my dear." After a silent struggle, Nina hands him the letters. What is more, she volunteers to go to the park-opening after all, and rushes off to put on a black dress. And that closes a stirringly dramatic third act.

But we have not yet done with thrills. In Act IV., after Hilary has quietly turned Maurewarde out of the house, the party come back from the ceremony, and the Ridgeleys treat the now submissive Nina more contemptuously than ever. There is a fine irony in the scene to the spectator who knows that the woman is bending her neck to the yoke just when she could, if she chose, turn and rend her persecutors. The sight is, however, too much for Hilary. He resolves that there shall be an end of it—and puts the fatal letters in his brother's hands. Nina, horrified, snatches and burns them. But they have been read, and Filmer Jesson's eyes are at length opened—opened to his own weakness, and his wife's sterling worth. The astounded Ridgeleys are politely bowed out of the house, and Hilary quietly shuts the door as Filmer and Nina sit affectionately, and at last with true understanding, side by side. Hilary's silent exit, by the way, is his best effect—far more eloquent than the prolix speeches which Mr. Pinero has lavished upon the part. If Hilary can only be persuaded to be more terse (and to reconsider his "doctrine of Divine interposition in the ordinary affairs of life") there will be no reasonable fault to find with *His House in Order*. For it would be hypercriticism to object to a certain exaggeration in the handling of the Ridgeley family. Though they

exist, dramatically, as a squad, rather than as individual agents, they are cleverly differentiated in details; the slight touch of convention in their treatment is legitimate and indeed inevitable; they remain always in the true key of comedy.

But since there is this trace of exaggeration, however slight, of convention, however legitimate, in the drawing of the Ridgeley family, all the more is it incumbent on the players to go delicately. "Glissez, mais n'appuyez pas" is the proverb, of which Mlle. Thomé, little Derek's French governess, might remind them. Fortunately they need no reminder. It would be difficult to better the tact, the artistic restraint, with which Miss Bella Pateman and Mr. Lyall Swete, Miss Beryl Faber and Mr. Lowne, present the humorous aspects of this family so monumentally humorless. They all four show triumphantly, as they are intended to show, the vast power for evil, for cruelty, for downright tyranny, of complacent, conscientious narrow-mindedness. Mr. Pinero makes, I submit, one little mistake over this group. He allows Hilary, the *raisonneur* of his play, to have an indignant explosion and to declare that the type, as a social pest, ought to be swept off the face of the earth. And this after Mr. Pinero has been turning them to such handsome account, forcing them to contribute to the public stock of harmless pleasure! No, Hilary, as a man of the world, ought to have learnt to suffer solemn bores gladly; where would *His House in Order* be without them? And, for that matter, the denunciation of bores comes with a peculiarly ill grace from Hilary. May one whisper it? He comes at times perilously near to being a bore himself. He loves the sound of his own voice. He is a perfect martyr to dictionary English; even in the most

intimate *tête-à-tête* he is careful to "admit that your allegations are not unfounded," or to "point out that matters will eventually adjust themselves." Well, as he himself would say, God bless him; he represents a little weakness of Mr. Pinero's, and so we must accept him with philosophic tolerance. Mr. Alexander plays him with manifest gusto; the more wordy the speech the more the actor seems to revel in it. Again, God bless him. At any rate, he is an excellent foil to the wayward, impulsive Nina of Miss Irene Vanbrugh, with her rapid *staccato* utterance, her febrile restlessness. In the great scene of the third act, when the woman stands out for revenge and the man pleads for renunciation, the acting of both rises to a high level of passionate sincerity.

## J. M. BARRIE

### *QUALITY STREET*

(VAUDEVILLE, *September 1902*)

THE charm of a genuine Barrie, while it is undeniable, is at the same time not very easily explicable. In the ultimate analysis I believe that the pleasure of a genuine Barrie will be found not so much in what the work—whether novel or play—says as in what it implies. That, of course, is true in a sense of any work of art; what we admire or dislike in it is, in the last resort, the artist behind it. Behind any genuine Barrie, by which I mean any work in which the man allows himself freely “to abound,” as the French say, “in his own sense,” lets himself go, as we English say, we are conscious of a sweet nature. There is ozone in the air; we are once more young barbarians, all at play; all things for us become seemly and of good report. It may look like æsthetic disparagement of Mr. Barrie’s work thus to dwell on its ethical aspect; and I shall run the risk of exciting prejudice against him in a certain order of minds if I say that he is one of the most moral writers I know. Yet so it is. Mr. Barrie justifies the simple, natural life; he demonstrates the essential virtuousness of cakes and ale and even of ginger hot i’ the mouth. *Quality Street* is a case in point. Its

theme, to speak generally, is the joy of living—of living, as the pedants would say, *κατὰ φύσιν*. More particularly the theme is the desire of women to love tenderly and to be honourably loved in return. That desire is never more charmingly exhibited than it is in young spinsters verging on an age when love seems in danger of passing them by. It is the theme of Jane Austen's *Persuasion*. If that classic instance comes automatically to the pen it is because Mr. Barrie's play chooses Jane Austen's period, and his characters speak the delightfully stilted language of Jane Austen's people.

It is true they all speak that language a little too emphatically; they are more royalist than the king, more Austenite than Jane herself. There are too many "ma'ams," and "vastlys," and "elegant females," and "vowings," and "protestings." Jane Austen's idiom was much more like our own than Mr. Barrie would have us suppose. And there are incongruities which grate on the ear. Jane Austen would never have talked of "object-lessons" or of a lady being "gown'd." To say "This will be a great year for females" and "I long to dazzle a male" is to burlesque her style. In harping on Jane Austen I am paying Mr. Barrie the greater compliment. He gives us something very like her delicate sampler-work, her pomander fragrance. And the story he tells might have been told by her.

Only she would have told it more quietly. *Quality Street* is always, what Jane Austen's work was never, a trifle jerky. It is Jane a little out of breath and flustered, just as Miss Susan Throssell's dear "white and blue" room is a little too garish for the period of the Brothers Adam. Miss Susan's younger sister Phœbe, aged twenty-one, expects a proposal of marriage from

Mr. Valentine Brown. He once kissed her cheek on the pretext that it was wet. But he only meant friendship, and, instead of proposing marriage, calls to say he is going to the wars. Then, for nine weary years, the dear "white and blue" room is turned into a school, and Phœbe's brightness becomes dimmed in the effort to master the rudiments of algebra for beginners. Let me say in passing that the fun of the scholars and the difficult algebra occupy nearly a whole act of the play. That is Mr. Barrie's way; he follows his humour wherever it leads him; and it sometimes leads him very far from the business in hand. Then, after nine years, Mr. Valentine Brown returns from the wars, at length convinced that what he thought was friendship was really love. The interval is significant; it is that for which Horace advised poets to bottle up their verses; and we may say, in Mr. Brown's case, that love, like poetry, is improved by observation of the maxim,

"... nonumque prematur in annum."

But Mr. Brown is not yet allowed to realise the full meaning of his feeling for Phœbe, for we are only at the end of Act II., and what would become of the play? Accordingly the interest is prolonged by a fantastic device. That also is Mr. Barrie's way; his plots are apt to be thin, and he spins them out by the first artifice that comes to hand. Phœbe pretends to be an imaginary niece of hers, one Livy, in order that she may reassume her well-nigh vanished youth without let or hindrance, and in order, too, that she may flirt violently with Mr. Valentine Brown at the officers' ball. Mr. Brown has a moment of mad love for the supposed Livy; but only a moment, for a revulsion of

feeling against the lively, forward Livy shows him that it is the shy modesty of Phœbe that he really adores. That is a delicious scene—a passage of Marivaux turned into Austenite English—wherein Brown, thinking that he is telling Livy why he does not love her, is really telling her why he does. Perhaps it is rather subtle for the footlights. That, once more, is Mr. Barrie's way: the way of supersubtlety, of emotional casuistry, which is rather the method of the novelist than of the playwright. And, finally, it is Mr. Barrie's way to prolong the story after the story is really at an end by a last act which is much ado about nothing. But we leave everything and everybody quite happy and cosy in the "white and blue" room; Mr. Brown has kissed Phœbe again—and has even kissed Miss Susan, who had never before in her life been kissed by a male.

It is all very pretty and sweet, but, as Matthew Arnold was never tired of quoting from Sainte-Beuve, every literary *genre* has its *écueil particulier*; and the *écueil particulier* of the pretty and sweet is the namby-pamby. Here and there *Quality Street* verges on the namby-pamby, so that we almost sigh for a wolf in the little sheep-fold. Here and there, too, it is a little garrulous—as garrulous, shall we say? as Jane Austen's Miss Bates. But the fact remains that it is a genuine Barrie, and, being a genuine Barrie, has an irresistible charm. It shows us the sweetness of life as lived by old maids, and by young maids who are honestly determined not to be old maids if they can help it. It makes us, like St. Augustine in his youth, in love with love. It has laid us up in lavender.

## THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON

(DUKE OF YORK's, November 1902)

IT has been whispered here and there that the root-idea of *The Admirable Crichton* is to be traced to a German play, *Robinsons Eiland*, by Ludwig Fulda. I mention the rumour, but feel quite indifferent as to its accuracy of fact. The root-idea of Mr. Barrie's "Fantasy in Four Acts" is really common property, an idea as old as the hills. But *difficile est proprie communia dicere*, and the point is what exactly an author makes of a common idea—whether he can appropriate it to himself by giving it an individual turn, the turn peculiar to his genius. Now on this point there cannot be the slightest doubt in the case of *The Admirable Crichton*. It is signed "Barrie" over and over again; hold it up to the light and you see "Barrie" in the watermark. And therefore it seems absurd to be reminded by it of some *Conte Philosophique* of Voltaire, because no one will accuse Mr. Barrie of being a Voltairean. But if we are to seek a literary analogy I would assuredly rather find it in eighteenth-century Gallic wit and philosophy than in the Teutonisms of Herr Fulda. In form a brilliant extravaganza, in substance a piece of hard logic, of close-packed thought, this play of Mr. Barrie's is in reality something which Voltaire could never have succeeded in writing had he tried till he was black in the face. Let me take

another glance at the eighteenth-century philosophers, and say the theme of this play comes straight from Rousseau. It deals with Rousseau's perpetual subject, "the return to nature." But it deals with that subject in a whimsical, pathetic, ironic, serious way which would have driven Rousseau crazy. Perhaps it takes a little too long in the telling. Perhaps the actors are a little slow. But when all discount has been allowed, the play is to my thinking as delightful a play as the English stage has produced in our generation; always fresh and exhilarating, yet always giving *furieusement à penser*.

The "return to nature." That is the theme, and in Act I. we find the Earl of Loam expounding it. His lordship believes in equality—once a month—and once a month invites his servants into the drawing-room, where, much to their discomfort, they are treated as honoured guests. In vain his lordship's daughters pout and protest; if any one of them is not properly polite, threatens the Earl, she shall be condemned to recite. Mr. Crichton, his lordship's butler, does not protest—he is too perfect a butler for that—but he does venture to hint that treating the servants as equals is not really a "return to nature." In London, he says, it is "natural" for earls to be earls and for servants to be servants. The butler alone, then, maintains the calm of philosophic resignation, while the domestics of the household strike attitudes of ludicrous discomposure. This scene of the servants in the drawing-room is a little masterpiece in the presentation of Low Life above Stairs. Dominating the scene is the austere figure of the butler, knowing his place, remembering, not without pride, that he is the son of a butler and a lady's-maid, "perhaps the happiest of all combinations."

Act II. shows us what the "return to nature" really is. The Earl and his family, yachting in the South Seas, have been wrecked on a desert island; and, as by a turn of the kaleidoscope, all the relative positions of the parties are changed. Crichton proves to be a born "handy man," full of invention, able to fashion needles out of hairpins, and to light fires by catching the sun's rays on a watch-glass. He also proves born to command. The rest of the party struggle feebly against his authority, but in vain. They even give him "notice," and retire to another part of the island. But he presides over the cooking-pot, and he knows that hunger will bring them back. The scene wherein they crawl humbly and silently back and gather in the darkness round the cooking-pot, over which Crichton is thoughtfully smoking his philosophic pipe, is the "return to nature" in dumb show. And the point is that Crichton has assumed his ascendancy not by willing it, not by domineering, but by sheer force of circumstance. He is the one strong man on the spot; the rest follows by a "natural" law. Nothing could be more droll—and nothing more deeply suggestive—than the impotence of the weaklings to assert themselves on the old social basis. "Nature" on an island establishes a different social hierarchy from that which is settled by "nature" in Mayfair. Crichton does nothing of set policy to further the change; he is indeed quite sorry for it; he simply cannot help it.

Two years have passed before the curtain rises on Act III., and in that interval an extraordinary transformation has been effected. Crichton, beginning as the pioneer and founder, has become the veritable king of the little community. The Earl has cheerfully descended to menial offices. His daughters wait

humbly upon King Crichton (and find they have insensibly acquired the trick of "washing their hands with invisible soap" which *he* had when a butler). The Earl's nephew has been trained to useful work by getting a ducking in a bucket whenever he lapses into one of his old Mayfair epigrams. The greatest change is in the character of Crichton himself. He suffers from megalomania, he condescends to the Earl's daughter, as King Cophetua to the beggar maiden. Everyone trembles at his slightest word.

But hark! What was that? A gun! A ship has by accident touched at the island, and a British naval party lands to carry the little community back to civilisation. Farewell, a long farewell to all Crichton's greatness! He could, at one moment, have allowed the ship's boat to return from the island without the discovery that it was inhabited. But he is too much of a man to suffer that; he will "play the game." And, as the rescue party enters, and the menials are once more addressed as lords and ladies and the nephew begins to think once more of his Mayfair epigrams, Crichton once more falls into his old respectful butler attitude.

In the last act they are all at home again. The nephew has brought out a book about their adventure, in which he figures as the hero, though he pays Crichton "a kindly tribute in a footnote." All the efforts of the family are now directed to hushing up the truth about what happened on the island. An old busybody, Lady Brocklehurst, is within an ace of discovering the facts, but Crichton holds his tongue, and settles down with the serving-wench who has been faithful to him all along in a little public-house in the Harrow Road, "at the more fashionable end."

I have spoken of the play as a *fantasia* on the theme of the "return to nature." Sir Leslie Stephen once said that he never saw the word "nature" without instinctively putting himself on his guard against some bit of slipshod criticism or sham philosophy, and that he heartily wished the word could be turned out of the language. This is all very well; but what would become of drama? Ever since the days of Thespis and his cart the drama has busied itself with the question, What is nature? and that, of course, in no mere dispassionate spirit of inquiry, but with the practical object of exalting nature, when "located" in any given set of circumstances, as the true guide of conduct. The conflict of forces which is at the root of all drama has been, nearly always, a conflict of nature on the one side against the various restraints—moral, social, political, religious, or merely formal—which the human race has imposed upon nature. And just here, one may say parenthetically, is to be found the real explanation of the antagonism displayed through all the Christian ages by all the Churches, by the Puritan spirit, by the Nonconformist conscience, by all the ascetic sects, to the theatre; because it is the mission of the theatre, willy-nilly, to exalt and glorify nature, while for all these other institutions nature is something to be checked and chastened and trampled under foot. The simple creed of Crichton in Mr. Barrie's play, "Whatever is natural is right," has always been the creed of the drama. Terence preached it as well as Molière; it is the common ground of authors otherwise so dissimilar as Sheridan and Dumas *fils*, as (with a more searching analysis of "nature") Henrik Ibsen and Henri Becque. Indeed, it is the great element of continuity in dramatic literature, this thesis that nature will

have her way, that though you expel her with a fork she will yet recur. Take this simple application of the thesis—that brides resist all schemes of education elaborated for them by elderly men and fly naturally into the arms of the first young gallant who comes in at the window. That is the story of *L'École des Femmes*; it is also the story of Mrs. Ryley's *Mice and Men*. Nature will not be denied is the implied thesis of the *Adelphi*; it is also, however differently worked out, the implied thesis of Mrs. Humphry Ward's *Eleanor*. All Mr. Gilbert's work in its various forms may be said to be a plea for nature—with a homely, rather prosaic, view of nature. So also may the work of M. Alfred Capus—who takes nature more easily, with a Rabelaisian liberality. No modern dramatist has been more anxiously concerned with nature than Mr. Bernard Shaw; we may not agree with him as to what shall be called "natural"—indeed, it is his deliberate purpose to upset the current views about that—but when once he has settled upon the "natural" he bids us follow it. He, like all his predecessors, holds Crichton's creed, Whatever is natural is right.

Virtually all the dramatists, then, have treated this "nature" theme in their several ways—as Hotgospellers (Dumas *fils*), or as "the plain man" (Molière), or satirically (Gilbert), or with irony (moral, Shaw; unmoral Becque; immoral, Capus). It has been reserved for Mr. Barrie to work out the theme in several moods at once; he is at once ironic, playfully satirical—as "detached" as you please—and yet very much in earnest, contemplating all forms of creed, and yet making it quite plain that he holds firmly to one. The simplicity and straightforwardness of *The Admirable*

*Crichton* as a play must not blind us to the subtlety and complexity of the ideas underlying it.

And, first, there is the question, What is nature? Equality, answers Lord Loam; all men are by nature equal. To be sure, his lordship's notions of equality are a little odd. He confutes in the very act of explaining himself. "I'll soon show you if I am not your equal," he says testily to his butler Crichton; "hold your tongue." Also his equality is subject, like comets, to the law of periodicity; all men are equal—once a month, when the servants take tea in the drawing-room. Crichton, on the other hand, declares for inequality as the law of nature. There will always be a social hierarchy, always the *régime* of master and servant. And the system extends further than his lordship suspects. Even were equality established in the drawing-room, it would never obtain in the servants' hall. "Little fleas have lesser fleas." A butler never "walks out" with a servant-girl, is never engaged; he may "cast a favourable eye." Between cook at one end of the kitchen table and John and Thomas at the other is the "tweeny" to pass the dishes. All are but parts of one stupendous whole, and the system is to Crichton not merely inevitable, but æsthetically gratifying and best for everyone. "To me," he cries, "the most beautiful thing in the world is a haughty aristocratic English house with everyone kept in his place. Though I were equal to you, what would be the pleasure to me? It would be counter-balanced by the pain of feeling that John and Thomas were equal to *me*."

At bottom Crichton's conception of nature is the evolutionist's: the perfect adaptation of organism to environment; and at once there arises the further question, What happens with a change of environment

—say, from Mayfair to a South Sea Island? To answer that question in action is the main object of the play—which, be it observed, would be a good play merely from the superficial drollery of its action, the humours of drawing-room and kitchen in Mayfair and the humours of castaways on a desert island, but which is a thousand times better play because underneath the drolleries at the surface is a logical *nexus* of ideas. What happens with the changed environment is an inversion of the old hierarchy; servants (being inured to practical work) become masters, and masters (being useless outside civilisation) become servants. And, mark, it is by no conscious volition that the change comes about, but by a natural law, “something not ourselves which makes for” the new inequality. Lord Loam sinks “naturally” to the bottom, just as Crichton rises “naturally” to the top. All the conscious effort there is is devoted by all concerned to the maintenance of the old order; but in vain. When Crichton lays down the rule “no work, no dinner,” he did not invent it, he “seemed to see it growing on the island.” And when the aristocrats, after giving Crichton “notice,” humbly creep back to him, he has not summoned them; it is their hunger drawing them to the cooking-pot. I have already described this scene of the return of the party to the cooking-pot as giving the gist of the play in dumb show. It is precisely this faculty of inventing such silent yet all-expressive actions which is the test faculty of the dramatist. After the “curtain” of *The Admirable Crichton*, Act II., no one can again question Mr. Barrie’s instinct for drama.

But Act III. is *the act*. It is not too much to say that it has a real philosophical significance. For it shows not only how well a new environment, a

new hierarchy, gets established, but how the features common to all hierarchies come "naturally" into being—a sort of kinship, the discipline of fear, a servile class, the curious effects of what we call "prestige." Power becomes so "natural" to Crichton that we even see the first germ of a "divine right" theory working in him. And not only have the others abandoned all idea of resistance; they are *battus et contents*, like George Dandin in very different circumstances. Lord Loam is content to pluck Crichton's poultry. Lady Mary is content to be Crichton's parlourmaid. And, more, we are shown how the dyer's hand is subdued to what it works in; how the new servants not only perform the duties, but acquire the very tricks of the old. The Earl finds himself repeating Crichton's old catchword, "Thank you, Sir," and Lady Mary, when waiting at table, mechanically rubs her hands as Crichton used to do. Thus we see that not only will there always, as Crichton declared in Act I., be masters and servants, but the two classes will always "naturally" behave "as sich," and in each will come out the "natural" *stigmata* of their employment.

Further, it is in this remarkable third act—almost disquieting by the reach of its intellectual suggestion—that Mr. Barrie, hitherto so detached, so playfully ironic, lets his own sincere conviction peep out. His conviction is that though all lives are "natural," when appropriate to their circumstances, the best "nature" is that of the wild island life. Under the influence of open air, hard exercise, and strict discipline—"no work, no dinner"—all the castaways are for the first time in their lives thoroughly happy. You are reminded of Thoreau at Walden Pond or

of Tusitala in Samoa. It is the old Abernethian recipe for happiness: live on sixpence a day—and earn it. And the lesson is pointed by the obvious falling-off in happiness when they all return in the last act to Mayfair, where the Earl is worried by his collars and Lady Mary has painfully to check herself from running up three stairs at a time. What a dismal contrast to their enjoyment when they were "barbarians all at play"! Indeed, the conclusion of the piece is the only portion of it which leaves a somewhat bitter flavour in the mouth. The aristocrats, who began by being merely fools, are driven in the end into being consummate liars. And they lie not only for self-preservation, but wantonly—publishing a book ascribing all Crichton's heroic acts to themselves, and barely mentioning "the servants" in a footnote. The most cruel thing is the dwindling of Crichton to his original proportions; and, what is more serious, it is an incredible thing. Dramatically, I admit, it must so befall; Mr. Barrie's scheme involves symmetry and contrast, the return of all concerned to their precise starting-point—after the fashion of those "biographs" at the music-halls which show the successive stages of a pillow-fight and then show those stages reversed. But while it was "natural" for Crichton to develop into the hero, or "overman" of Acts II. and III., it was not "natural" for him to shrink back into his old self. For "nature"—if I may hazard something about her on my own account—never forgets. As the island life turned a butler into a ruler, says Mr. Barrie, so civilisation turned the ruler back into a butler. That is rather too savage an indictment of civilisation.

However, there is the play, brimful of ideas, and,

quite apart from your delight in the sheer amusement of the thing, you welcome it with gratitude for its ideas. For what the English stage most sorely needs at this time of the day is ideas; and the advent of a dramatist who like Mr. Barrie can *play* with ideas, can (as Dr. Johnson said, "the dogs," his opponents, could not) "write trifles with dignity," is a rare piece of luck.

## *PETER PAN*

(DUKE OF YORK'S, December 1904)

THERE has always been much of the frank and trusting simplicity of the child in Mr. Barrie's work, of the child for whom romance is the true reality and that which children of a larger growth call knowledge, something divined to be not worth knowing. It was certain, therefore, in advance that when he set himself to write a play for children and about children he would give us of his very best, his most fanciful, and his most tender. *Peter Pan* is from beginning to end a thing of pure delight. Mr. and Mrs. Darling are a young couple with three little children, Wendy, John, and Michael, and, strange to say, the children have a four-footed nurse, the dog Nana, who turns on the "hot" and "cold" taps in the bath with his teeth, lays out their night-clothes to dry before the nursery fire, and, what is more, sees that they take their medicine at the proper time. In this matter of medicine Mr. Darling affects to set the children an example by bravely taking the nauseous draught himself; but Mr. Darling, I am sorry to say, is a humbug, and he surreptitiously pours the stuff into Nana's milk, thereby earning and richly deserving the contempt of Wendy, John, and Michael. By and by, when father and mother have gone off to their dinner-party (Mr. Darling giving a sad exhibition

of grown-up "temper" over a white tie) and the children have gone off to sleep, Peter Pan comes in at the window. Peter Pan is a prose Puck, a twentieth-century Ariel, who has come to the children's nursery to recover his shadow, which had been unfortunately caught tight in the window-sash. He is accompanied by the fairy Tinker Bell, though we are only aware of her presence by her tintinnabulation and by a will-o'-the-wisp gleam of light on the wall. The tintinnabulation awakes Miss Wendy, who graciously offers Peter a kiss. But as Peter doesn't know what a kiss is she gives him a thimble instead, so that ever afterwards Peter calls thimbles "kisses" and kisses "thimbles." Then John and Michael wake up too, and Peter teaches all three how to fly. But whither shall they fly? Why not to Peter's home, the Never-Never-Land, peopled by children who, when infants, have been dropped out of their perambulators by careless nursemaids and have not been claimed within seven days? Out then they all float through the nursery window, and we follow them to the Never-Never-Land, where they live underground, descending through the hollow trunks of trees, and using a big mushroom as a chimney for their kitchen fire. Besides the young inhabitants who began life by dropping out of a perambulator, the Never-Never-Land is peopled by Red Indians and Pirates, who lose no time in showing us that they know how to "behave as sich." The Red Indians always lay their ear to the ground, then give vent to unearthly yells, and prepare for scalping somebody—a Pirate, for choice. At the head of the Pirates is the terrible James Hook, so-called because he has a formidable hook in lieu of a right hand. The hand, we learn, has been bitten off by a crocodile, who

liked it so much that he has been ever since in quest of James Hook, in order to make a meal off the rest of him. Fortunately the crocodile has swallowed a clock, so that his presence is always announced by a loud tick. Some day the clock must run down, and James Hook dreads that day with a deadly fear. Meanwhile, the Pirates go a-pirating and the Redskins a-redskinning with gusto and many choruses. These are not the only perils that beset the children. There are fierce wolves who decline to be driven away until someone luckily remembers that you may frighten away a wolf by looking at him with your head between your legs.

The plot, which may be said to have hitherto been "in solution," now begins to crystallise round Miss Wendy. The motherless boys who fell out of the perambulators have unanimously adopted her as their little mother. (Note, in passing, this latest instance of Mr. Barrie's fondness for the idea of a child playing mother to other children—an idea used in *The Wedding Guest* as well as in *Little Mary*.) This arouses the jealousy of the Pirates, for they, too, have never known a mother's love, and they resolve to kidnap Wendy in order that she may be a mother to them, instead of to the little boys. But the motherhood of Wendy involves the fatherhood of Peter Pan, and that corollary is extremely distasteful, not only to the Pirates, but also to the Redskins, and even to the fairy Tinker Bell. For the chief maiden of the Redskin tribe wants Peter for herself; so does the fairy; while the Pirates have clearly no use for Peter. Thereupon James Hook resolves to murder Peter with poison double-distilled from a plum-cake, and would have succeeded, had not the fairy drunk off the poison

instead. Then shall the fairy die? No, for Peter Pan appeals to the audience—to "all you who believe in fairies"—to save her by their cheers, and of course does not appeal in vain. But James Hook and his buccaneers have, in the meantime, kidnapped Wendy and the other children, gagging and binding them as they severally ascend from underground through the trunks of the trees; just as the Spanish soldiers are severally gagged and bound in M. Sardou's *Patrie*. It shall be Peter Pan's task to rescue them.

This peripety brings us to the deck of the Pirate Ship. The children are under hatches, while the Pirates dance hornpipes overhead and James Hook paces the quarter-deck, giving a continuous burlesque of old nautical melodrama. It is now time for the unhappy children to walk the plank—though two of them shall be spared to serve as cabin-boys if only they will cry "Down with King Edward." Proudly the dauntless boys reply with "God save the King," and "Rule Britannia," and so the dread plank is run out over the side. But hush! What is that sound? Tick-tick-tick! It is the crocodile, the implacable enemy of James Hook, who cowers in a corner, bidding the rest to hide him. And now what do we see? Yes, no, yes—it is Peter Pan and no crocodile, who has ingeniously provided himself with a clock. Swiftly he unlooses the children's bonds, and as swiftly armed to the teeth they fall upon the astonished Pirates. To throw the scoundrels overboard is the work of a moment. Into the deep they go, sending up great splashes of real water, till Hook and Peter are left face to face. "James Hook, you have to reckon with me—Peter Pan, the Avenger." The combat is brief but fierce, and of course in the end the wicked

Hook goes over the side—splash!—to his watery grave. Then down with the Jolly Roger, and up with the Union Jack, and three hearty cheers, with three cheers more, for Peter Pan, the Avenger!

After seeing more of the crocodile, and more of the Redskins, and even more of the Pirates (for they are not all so dead as had been supposed), we begin to wonder how poor bereaved Mr. and Mrs. Darling are getting on. So do Wendy, John, and Michael, who accordingly return home, to find their father living, in token of remorse, in Nana's kennel (in which he gets invited out to "smart" parties, and makes a speech to the members of the Stock Exchange). Then they rush into their mother's arms (in a scene suggesting a famous one from *La Joie fait Peur*), and everybody lives happy ever afterwards—except, I am afraid, poor Peter Pan, who has no mother to go home to, and is last seen gazing very, very sadly and wistfully through the nursery window. The whole affair is a delicious frolic, touched with the lightest of hands, full of quiet wisdom and sweet charity, under its surface of wild fun, and here and there not without a place for a furtive tear.

# BERNARD SHAW

## *CANDIDA*

(COURT, April 1904)

FANTASY has its place in the theatre, as well as realism, and that is one reason why the theatre has room for Mr. Bernard Shaw. His method of travestying life is to eliminate from it everything but the pure intelligence. Just as Mr. H. G. Wells amuses us by supposing a world where the laws of gravity are suspended, or where there is no such thing as time, or where space is of  $x$  dimensions, so Mr. Shaw amuses us by representing a world where conduct is regulated by thought, and men love women, as the civil servant in *Pickwick* ate crumpets, on principle. There are, no doubt, such people in real life, people who choose their diet, their clothes, and their wives on principle; people, even, who in flat defiance of Scripture do by taking thought add a cubit to their stature. I forget how many millions of inhabitants there are on the Planet Terra, but evidently there are quite enough to realise all thinkable things in actual facts. If you will only go on dealing for ever, you are bound one day to hold thirteen trumps. All the same, if you choose that day for the "period" of a whist-drama, you will present fantasy, not realism. So it is with ideas. Ideas count for next to nothing in the fundamental human

relationships. Our little exploits in coherent thought are mere bobbing corks on the great stream of life. Ideas, like dukes in Mr. Gilbert's opera, are two a penny. We are such stuff as dreams, not manuals of logic, are made of. "Why did I love my friend?" asks Montaigne, and gives the only true answer: "Because it was he, because it was I." By systematically ignoring this all-important side of life, all its subconscious and unconscious elements, by representing life in general and love in particular as based upon ratiocination, Mr. Shaw obtains most amusing results.

Thus in *Candida* he takes the familiar dramatic situation of a woman between two men, but his peculiar treatment makes the familiar situation something quite new and strange and diverting. The lady is beloved by her clerical husband, who has a clergyman's ideas, and also by a young poet, who has a poet's ideas. At a given moment the clergyman takes the poet by the coat-collar and gives him a good shaking. The poet, so soon as he has recovered his breath, shouts out: "I'm not afraid of a clergyman's ideas. I'll fight your ideas. I'll rescue her [Candida, the parson's wife] from her slavery to them; I'll pit my own ideas against them. You are driving me out of the house because you daren't let her choose between your ideas and mine." In an ordinary play, of course, in a representation of life, this would merely be a speech "in character"—the speech of a man who, being hit, cannot hit back with his fists, but hits back with his rhetoric. But Mr. Shaw actually means it; it is the very thesis of his play. The parson's ideas *do* waver, break, and flee before the poet's ideas; the lady *is* asked to choose between the

two sets of ideas, and gravely, without irony, makes her choice accordingly. It is an amusing game, worked out with the "elegance" of a mathematical demonstration.

To crown the joke, Mr. Shaw takes care to give his fantasy a certain admixture of reality. While his dramatic conflict is a conflict of pure ideas, it is ostensibly carried out by people who are, externally at any rate, familiar types in the world around us. We know the East End parson, a "muscular Christian," a bit of a socialist, a "strenuous" worker of good works. We know the poet, with some traits borrowed from Shelley and others from De Quincey. As for *Candida* herself, we know her only too well. She is the managing, mothering, thoroughly competent woman, who carries about innumerable bags and parcels, with an aggressive air of brisk usefulness, and cannot talk to a man without patting him on the back, or retying his cravat, or picking bits of cotton off his coat. In real life she is what American slang calls a "holy terror." In Mr. Shaw's fantasy she attracts the love and admiration of every man who comes near her. She is the star and they are the moths. Whole sets of ideas—parsonical ideas and poetical ideas—gyrate furiously around her. That is part of Mr. Shaw's fun, but this time it is not intentional fun. As a rule, he keeps his sympathies well in hand. He treats both parson and poet calmly and dispassionately. But he cannot conceal his conviction that the *Candidas* of this world are angels in petticoats.

There is nothing in all this that one could not have told from the printed play. What further impressions do we get from the acted play? Mainly a heightening of the fun, a sharper sense of the incongruity between the external reality of the people

and the internal fantasy of their actions. We *see* Candida flicking the cotton off the gentleman's coat and carrying the little parcels and bags, we *hear* her gravely "opting" between parson and poet: "I give myself to the weaker of the two." And the minor characters, who are unalloyed reality—the parson's typist and his curate and his father-in-law—become, of course, more solidly real on the stage, present a more startling contrast to the essentially fantastic protagonists. Further, we have the pleasure of an actual performance, the pleasure of seeing what the players make of their parts and how their notions of them correspond or not with our own preconceived notions. In this respect one has no disappointment to record. Miss Rorke's Candida, like Mr. McKinnell's parson and Mr. Granville Barker's poet, was the very thing; while Miss Sydney Fairbrother revealed much more in Proserpine than one ever guessed to be there, and both the father-in-law of Mr. A. G. Poulton and the curate of Mr. Athol Stewart were as good as could be. The fact is, intelligent actors must revel in Mr. Shaw's plays; they are never called upon to open their mouths without saying something worth saying, and whatever they are called upon to do there can be no doubt in their minds as to what, precisely, it is.

On the other hand, the stage-presentation of *Candida* adds nothing to what is the chief delight of the play—the chief delight of every one of Mr. Shaw's plays—its brilliant dialectic. And in one respect the spectator is actually deprived of a pleasure enjoyed by the reader. The book gives characteristic fragments of exegesis which necessarily disappear on the stage. One example is the account—as good as any "portrait" of La Bruyère—of the father-in-law,

Mr. Burgess. Another occurs at the fall of the curtain. The stage direction is "They (husband and wife) embrace. But they do not know the secret in the poet's heart." On the stage the actors can, and do, embrace; but they have no possible means of telling the spectator, by their actions, whether they do or do not know the secret in the poet's heart. On the whole, however, *Candida* on the stage is capital sport. Mr. Shaw maintains that he is quite serious, an out-and-out realist; in short, that in saluting him as a merry sportsman one is like the young lady who, when Sydney Smith said grace, shook him by the hand with a "Thank you so much, Mr. Smith; you are always so amusing." If so, one is evidently in the ignorant position of Candida and her husband when they embrace at the fall of the curtain; one does not know the secret in the playwright's heart.

## *JOHN BULL'S OTHER ISLAND*

(COURT, November 1904)

"IT'S all rot," says Broadbent, the Englishman, of some speech by his Irish friend, Larry Doyle, "it's all rot, but it's so brilliant, you know." Here, no doubt, Mr. Shaw is slyly taking a side-glance at the usual English verdict on his own works. That verdict will need some slight modification in the case of *John Bull's Other Island*. For, in the first place, the play is not *all* rot. Further, it has some other qualities than mere brilliancy. It is at once a delight and a disappointment. It delights by its policy of pin-pricks. Mr. Shaw takes up the empty bladders of life, the current commonplaces, the cant phrases, the windbags of rodomontade, the hollow conventions, and the sham sentiments; quietly inserts his pin; and the thing collapses with a pop. Occasionally, he indulges in fiercer onslaughts with more formidable weapons. Like Johnson, after a certain conversation described by Garrick, he has "tossed and gored several persons." The play delights, again, by its able dialectic. Its interlocutors never shirk a point or swerve from it; every side gets a fair hearing, and though, in the end, all parties are dismissed with costs, you have a conviction that justice has been done. Englishmen and Irishmen alike get credit for their qualities as well as their defects. As an Irishman Mr. Shaw, perhaps,

permits himself to tell us more than any English writer could venture to say about his countrymen's weaknesses. There he speaks with authority. Add that Mr. Shaw has, for once, succeeded in depicting a natural and delightful woman. On the other hand the play is a disappointment because of its wilful, perverse disregard of anything like construction. It is written on the "go-as-you-please" principle, without beginning, middle, or end. People wander in and out quite casually and say whatever happens to come into Mr. Shaw's head at the moment. A rivulet of "story" meanders through a meadow of "Shawisms" and trickles dry long before the curtain descends. There is no reason whatever why the play should end when it does—except that Mr. Shaw has had enough of it. Some of us may perhaps wish he had got tired just a little (say half an act) sooner.

Broadbent is a typical John Bull Englishman. With a native fund of "horse-sense," indefatigable energy, an incurable optimism, and a total incapacity to sympathise with any other *ethos* or understand any other point of view than his own, he lives mainly upon shibboleths—Free Trade, Home Rule, Championship of Oppressed Nationalities, the Sacred Memory of Our Grand Old Man, and Reform. Asked to define Reform he replies that it is the pious conservation of such existing reforms as have been brought about by the Great Liberal Party. If anyone is sick or sorry, he cheers them with the assurance that it will be all right after the next election. I have said that he is a Home Ruler. He is now minded to study Ireland on the spot, and desires to take with him his Irish friend Larry Doyle. Larry contemplates the trip without enthusiasm, for he is an Anglicised Irishman who knows things

about Ireland which do not quite accord with Broadbent's anticipations. Broadbent appeals to Larry's Irish heart. "Oh, never mind my heart," says Larry, "an Irishman's heart is nothing but his imagination." Then Broadbent puts down his friend's gloom to "the melancholy of the Celtic race." "Celtic" has nothing to do with it, is the reply, it is the Irish climate and landscape and humdrum surroundings. Anyway, retorts Broadbent, there is the charm of the Irish voice and the Irish brogue. Larry explains that the voice is only the result of a frugal diet, while, as to the brogue, his friend does not know the real thing from the sham article, brought from Glasgow or the Scotland Road Division of Liverpool for consumption in cockney music-halls. After this conversation the pair set out for Ireland.

Here, in the village of Roscullen, we make the acquaintance of native types: the peasant with local superstitions that are really Pagan; the parish priest, who reproves the peasant's superstitions, but displays worse Catholic ones of his own; and a certain Keegan, an unfrocked priest, who passes for a madman and is really a mystic. Keegan, an Irish St. Francis, talks with grasshoppers, calls the donkey and the pig "my brother," has been taught by a dying Hindu to believe in metempsychosis, and asserts (with the devil in *Dr. Faustus*) that this earth of ours is really hell. Broadbent, who is the first of the two visitors to arrive, meets with Miss Nora, an old sweetheart of Larry's who has been pining for him through all the years in which he has neglected her. The Englishman at once falls in love; but the Irish girl tells him it is only the native potheen, which is too strong for his head, and gently but firmly leads him home to bed. Next morning there is a village conclave, composed of Larry's father, the priest,

and a couple of small farmers, who concoct a scheme for turning Larry into a member of Parliament. Larry's principles are not theirs, he explains, but they make light of so absurd a reason. "What we want is to get a new class of man into Parliament—a man who can afford to live in London and pay his own way until Home Rule arrives." Larry still declines the offer, which is then transferred to Broadbent, who eagerly accepts it, and begins to spout all the English Home Rule shibboleths. So great is his admiration for the country that he firmly believes that, if once Home Rule is established, the whole Liberal party will become "naturalised Irishmen." The real Irishmen laugh at him in their sleeves, and fool him to the top of his bent. To get "popularity" he offers to take a farmer's pig home on his motor-car. The landlord question and Church question are debated, and Mr. Shaw hits out all round. There is a little gem in the way of a dialogue between Broadbent's cockney valet and an embittered Irish farmer, in which the valet tells the farmer that there are worse evictions in Lambeth than ever there were in Roscullen. But, thank goodness, Englishmen are free. Ay, retorts the farmer, it's little use muzzling sheep.

Broadbent's motor-car has run over the farmer's pig and knocked the window out of the Roscullen china-shop; but, unabashed, the Englishman again deluges the sniggering villagers with Home Rule shibboleths—and again makes love to Nora, who, this time, accepts him. She accepts him on finding that Larry does not really care for her. (Larry, who has not seen her for eighteen years, can only hum a tune and talk about the weather, and admits that what should have been a romantic occasion is a dismal failure. "All these great

sentimental events usually are failures.") Nora, however, who has a fortune of £40 a year, is much disgusted to find that, for electioneering purposes, she will have to shake hands with the "common people" in Roscullen. She is met by the remark that "For an M.P.'s wife, no one is common whose name is on the register." Finally, there is a discussion about heaven, in which the Englishman talks of a dream of "blue satin" and Keegan delivers a mystical oration about various idealistic trinities; and with Broadbent's announcement that he will build a big hotel in Roscullen, make golf-links, and "restore" the old round tower, the curtain descends upon what is, of course, not a play but a thoroughly characteristic "Shavian" entertainment.

## *MAN AND SUPERMAN*

(COURT, *May 1905*)

IT has been bruited abroad that Mr. Bernard Shaw is a somewhat lukewarm admirer of Shakespeare. If this be so, it is only one more illustration of the familiar gnomic saying of Euripides that there is no enmity so fierce as that of brother against brother. For Mr. Shaw and Shakespeare have at least one conspicuous bond of fraternal relationship; they both use the same stage technique. To Mr. Shaw as to Shakespeare organic plot-development is a matter of indifference, as compared with the systematic exhibition of ideas. They both ignore the *liaison des scènes* with a splendid carelessness, and ruthlessly sacrifice imitation of external life to any passing velleity for propagandism. It is not the same propagandism, of course. Shakespeare's is the propagandism of current morality or beauty or sheer poetry; Mr. Shaw's is the propagandism of paradox or inconoclasm or sheer antinomianism. But the effect on the dramatic form is the same. Hamlet interrupts the action on the platform at Elsinore to expatiate on alcoholism, Gertrude keeps Ophelia's bier waiting in the wings while she gives a "word picture" of a river bank, John Tanner brings everybody and everything to a standstill (always "talking," as Ann pithily puts it) in order to give forth so much of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer as Mr. Shaw

has chanced to assimilate. Thus for the sake of something which may be very fine, but certainly is not drama, both dramatists cheerfully let the quintessential drama go hang. Neither of them is, for stage purposes, a man "looking before and after"; they are both playhouse Cyrenaics, living in the moment for the moment's sake. This identical result has arisen from very different causes. For Shakespeare there were the limitations and the licence of the platform-stage, together with a tremendous energy of creation which was perpetually driving him outside the bounds of drama. For Mr. Shaw there are his own limitations; he, too, is perpetually energising outside the bounds of drama, and if for a moment he gets inside them it is by a mere fluke. It is piquant to find identity of form so absolute with such a world-wide difference of content. No need, is there, to account for that difference? On the one hand a born dramatist, and that the greatest; on the other a man who is no dramatist at all. Let me not be misunderstood. When I venture to say that Mr. Shaw is no dramatist I do not mean that he fails to interest and stimulate and amuse us in the theatre. Many of us find him more entertaining than any other living writer for the stage. But that is because he is bound to be an entertaining writer in any art-form—essay or novel or play. All I mean is that when he happens to choose the play as the form in which he shall entertain us there is a certain artistic waste. There is waste, because Mr. Shaw neglects, or more probably is impotent to fulfil, what Pater calls the responsibility of the artist to his material. You forgive the waste for the sake of the pleasure. Nevertheless, in the interests of good drama it is one's duty to be dis-

satisfied. We want a play that shall be a vehicle for the Shavian philosophy and the Shavian talent and, at the same time, a perfect play. Shall we ever get it? Probably not, in this imperfect world. We certainly do not get it in *Man and Superman*.

Were it not for the typographical inconvenience of the arrangement one might draw up a balance-sheet of this play in two parallel columns. The left-hand column would display the action-plot. I use the term action, of course, in its widest sense, so as to cover not merely the external incident but the psychologic and, more particularly, the emotional movement and "counterpoint" of the play. The right-hand column would give the idea-plot—that is to say, the more or less logical *nexus* of concepts in the author's mind which form the stuff, the real *raison d'être* of the play. Only by that method of sharp visual contrast could one hope to bring to light the masked interdependence of the action-plot and idea-plot and the curious way in which the one is warped and maimed in being made to serve as the vehicle for the other. One would have been better able to show by the method of parallel columns that the action-plot is well-nigh meaningless without the key of the idea-plot; that regarded as an independent entity it is often trivial and sometimes null; and that it is because of this parasitic nature of the action-plot, because of its weakness, its haphazardness, its unnaturalness, considered as a "thing in itself," that one finds the play as a play unsatisfying.

The idea-plot I am not called upon to criticise. In the playhouse a dramatist's ideas are postulates not to be called in question. Theories of Schopenhauer about woman and the sex-instinct or of Nietzsche

about a revised system of conduct are most assuredly open to discussion, but not by the dramatic critic. His business is, first and foremost, with the action-plot. For that is what we *see*; it is in fact the play itself, in the sense that it is what is being played under our noses; it is the sum of all the direct appeals to our sensations, before we start the secondary process of inferring and concluding. Now what do we see on the stage of the Court Theatre? What is it that we are asked to accept for an hour or two as part and parcel of our daily human life? We see, first of all, a smug, bald-headed old gentleman who proceeds, *à propos de bottes*, to spout the respectable middle-class Mill-Spencer-Cobden Liberalism of the mid-Victorian age. Then we see him vivaciously "cheeked" by a youngish, excitable, voluble gentleman, who evidently stands for the latest intellectual "advance." The younger man tells us, by and by, that he is a product of Eton and Oxford; but those of us who think we know that product will nourish a secret conviction that he is really, like his *chauffeur*, a product of the Board School and the Polytechnic. He has steeped himself in those fragments of the newest German philosophy which find their way into popular English translations, and he spends his time—mark, the *whole* of his time—in spouting these precious theories. He does this, as he admits, because he has no sense of shame; to put it more simply, he is a young person of rather bad manners. We note—for in the theatre the most trivial detail that we *see* outweighs the most important philosophy that we deduce—that he wears a beard which in a few years' time will resemble Mr. Shaw's; and he has already acquired Mr. Shaw's habit (an apparently deliberate piece of "business," and there-

fore one stands excused for mentioning it) of combing his beard with his fingers. It is not unfair to assume that there is as much of Mr. Shaw in Jack Tanner as there is of Shakespeare in Hamlet; and that (if Professor Bradley only knew it!) is saying a good deal. Casually, this young man lets fall the remark that he is descended from Don Juan. Why? What is Don Juan doing *dans cette galère*? That you soon discover when you are introduced to Miss Ann. For Miss Ann is the new Don Juan, the huntress of men—no, of one man (that is to say, no Don Juan at all, but for the moment let that pass), the one man being Jack Tanner. Miss Ann means to marry Jack, though he does not yet know it. What he does know (from the German) is that man is the helpless prey of the "mother woman" through the influence of the "life force." This Tanner expounds, in good set Schopenhauerian terms, to a sentimental young man, half engaged to Ann, alleged to be a "poet." "Alleged" is the word, because this young man's profession of poet is, for stage purposes, a non-effective force. So far as the play is concerned the "poet" might just as well be a drysalter. And thus it is that, busied as in the theatre we must be with the action-plot, we are perpetually baffled and pulled up—wondering why Tanner is descended from Don Juan and why Octavius is alleged to be a poet. Also we wonder why Tanner lectures poor mild milksopish Octavius about the devastating egoism of the "artist man"—how the "artist man" is (apparently) the masculine of the "mother woman," how they are twin creators, she of children, he of mind, and how they live only for that act of creation, so that there is the devil to pay (examples from literary history) when they happen to

become man and wife. This, we say to ourselves, may be all very true; but why does Tanner say it all, just at that moment, to the alleged poet but obvious barber's-block Octavius? While we are thus racking our brain we are interrupted by a new diversion. Octavius's sister (whom we have never seen or heard of) is suddenly reported to have "gone wrong." Agony of Octavius; glaring reprobation of the "respectable" types; and coruscation of Nietzschean fireworks from Tanner. Conventional morality, humbug! Is motherhood less holy—I beg pardon, less helpful—because it is motherhood without "marriage lines"? Etc., etc. (I say "etc., etc.", because the worst of Mr. Shaw's cheap German philosophic baggage is that when you see the first article you know all the rest of the set beforehand.) But stop; you may spare all trouble over the argument. For lo! it is a mistake, a false scent. Octavius's sister proves to be really and truly married. And the curtain of the first act descends upon a group cowering, as Tanner says, before the wedding ring.

Now this, the first section of the action-plot, is of course on the face of it a mere *pot-pourri*, a Caucus race, chaos come again. You have been immensely amused, Cyrenaically enjoying the moment for the moment's sake, but looking before and after (as you cannot help looking in the theatre) you have been disconcerted. What is the key to the mystery? The key is the idea-plot. Glance at that for a moment and you will see why Octavius is alleged to be a poet and why his sister is falsely alleged to be no better than she should be. (*a*) Fundamental idea: the irresistible power of woman over man in carrying out the aim of nature (or the "life force") to make her a mother. (*b*) Development: partly in Ann's actions, mainly in

Tanner's talk. And there, in that disproportion, at once you touch a dramatic weakness of the play. The properly dramatic development would have thrown all the onus upon Ann—we should have seen Ann energising as the "mother woman," and nothing else—and would have hept Tanner's mouth shut. But Mr. Shaw cannot exhibit, or can only feebly exhibit, by character and action; his native preference is for exposition by dialectic and ratiocination—*i.e.* by abstract talk; which is one of the reasons why you conclude he is no dramatist. (*c*) Corollary of the fundamental idea: if motherhood is nature's aim, then marriage is a detail—our morality which brands motherhood *minus* a wedding ring is false. Hence the "false scent" about Octavius's sister's baby. (*d*) Antithetical question suggested by the fundamental idea: is there not a male counterpart to the "mother woman"? Mr. Shaw hunts about. Yes, no, yes—it must be, the "artist man." Hence the alleged poetic vocation of Octavius, in order that Tanner may have a cue for haranguing him about the "artist man" and the "mother woman." Not otherwise do they insert cues in "musical comedies" when the time has come for a song or dance. That is one reason why "musical comedies" are like Mr. Shaw's comedies—not comedies. If Mr. Shaw's play were a real play there would be no need to explain the action-plot by laborious reference to the idea-plot. The one would be the natural garment of the other; or rather the one would be the flesh of which the other was the bones. Octavius would be a real poet in the dramatic action (as is, for instance, the case with the poet in *Candida*); there would be no false alarm about Octavius's sister; Ann would exhibit Mr. Shaw's thesis "on her own," instead

of by the help of Mr. Jack Tanner's lecture-wand and gift of the gab. In that way we should miss many diverting moments; but only in some such way as that could we get a real play.

There is little or no dramatic development in Acts II. and III. For look again at the idea-plot and you will see that it soon exhausts itself, so that the action-plot, being as I have said a mere parasite of the other, is bound very rapidly to give out. Tanner can only continue to Schopenhauerise, and the moment of his falling into the lady's arms will synchronise with that in which the author is tired of his game and brings down the curtain. The so-called poet peters out; indeed, never existed. His sister is provided with an American husband. Why? *Vide*, once more, idea-plot. The super-chivalric American view of woman, being a contrast to the Schopenhauerian, obviously calls for mention. Hence Mr. Hector Malone. Hence also, indirectly, Mr. Malone senior, American millionaire and ex-Irish emigrant (opportunity for short *bravura* episode about wrongs of Ireland)—a character which—rare mischance with Mr. Shaw!—hovers on the outer edge of the tiresome. All that is left to be done is to emphasise in Ann woman's talent for lying (type-example: Raina in *Arms and the Man*), at the same time getting it neatly hooked on to the Schopenhauerian "mother woman" theory. Two subordinate characters—Ann's mother, middle-aged, querulous, helpless in her daughter's hands, and the cockney *chauffeur*, the *fine fleur* of Board School education, Henry Straker. These two small parts, from the point of view of genuine and fresh observation, are among the best things in the play. In them Mr. Shaw has been content to reproduce, instead

of deducing. Would that he more often fell a victim to the same weakness!

The acting is quite admirable. Never was playwright more lucky in finding a born interpreter of his talent than Mr. Shaw in the case of Mr. Granville Barker. He is so alert, so exuberant, so "brainy," so engagingly impudent, so voluble in his patter! The Straker of Mr. Edmund Gwenn is a little masterpiece of truthful portraiture. Miss Sarah Brooke, as Octavius's maligned sister, is deliciously cool and trim and "smart." If Miss Lillah McCarthy does not bring home to us the full, irresistible seduction of the "mother woman," it is no fault of hers. Mr. Shaw has conceived Ann not as a character, but as a pure idea, a walking theory; Miss McCarthy turns her almost into a genuine character, and entirely into an agreeable woman. How voluptuous she might have been, how credible a female Don Juan, if Mr. Shaw had only given her the chance! But examination of Mr. Shaw's *théâtre complet* shows us that it is not in him to "do" a voluptuary. His present play, *ex hypothesi*, was concerned with the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. The Devil (a delightfully prominent person in the printed version) has unhappily had to be omitted on the stage. As for the Flesh, it never began to be warm, but is merely an intellectual category. Mr. Shaw is no flesh-painter.

## MAJOR BARBARA

(COURT, November 1905)

M. AUGUSTIN FILON has said the right thing about Mr. Bernard Shaw. "L'enfant terrible est devenu un enfant gâté." Mr. Shaw has become the fashion, and in becoming the fashion he has given way to the besetting sin of the fashionable; he has become a law, or rather a caprice, unto himself. He exaggerates his own perversities, revels in his own weaknesses, parades his own prejudices. And it is all so naïvely done! You are reminded of what Sterne said to the lady. "Pooh, pooh, ma'am, look at your child there, lolling on the carpet. He shows much that we conceal, but in perfect innocence, my dear ma'am, in perfect innocence." In perfect innocence Mr. Shaw puts his apology into the mouth of one of the people in *Major Barbara*. "Andrew, this is not the place for making speeches;" and Andrew replies, "I know no other way of expressing myself." Exactly! Here is a dramatist who knows no other way of expressing himself in drama than the essentially undramatic way of speech-making. He never knew any other way, but in his earlier plays he did make an effort to conceal the fact. In his earlier plays there was some pretence of dramatic form, unity, coherence. In Major Barbara there is none. His motto is that of his own Andrew Undershaft—"Unashamed." And

the worst of it is, this innocence of Mr. Shaw's, the shameless innocence of the child, is more effective than the wisdom of the serpent. "Faiblesse qui est une force," as Professor Bellac says of something else. All the time the innocent Mr. Shaw is taking a mean advantage of playwrights far less guileless than himself. Many of our playwrights have skill, one or two have even thoughts, but unfortunately their skill is wasted on rubbish, and their thoughts are never concerned with things worth thinking about. Now Mr. Shaw has no dramatic skill, has apparently no dramatic instinct, but he is a thinker who from first to last deals with things worth thinking about. And so you turn with relief, nay, with positive joy, from the intellectual commonplaces of the average English playwright to the intellectual eccentricity of Mr. Shaw. Though a dramatist he is not, he is a first-class pleasure-monger. That is why he has become the fashion in a pleasure-seeking world. But one word of warning. He must not abuse his vogue. Amusing as he is, he is perhaps not amusing for quite so long as he supposes. The truth is, he doesn't know when to stop. He lapses into *longueurs*. There is a Professor of Greek in the play who might quote to Mr. Shaw a familiar line about that. "A yawn," says Euripides, "silently rebukes the garrulous poet."

But for two at least of his three acts Mr. Shaw's garrulity is never tiresome. The play opens with a delightful conversation between Lady Britomart Undershaw and her son Stephen. Lady Britomart (daughter of a Whig Earl, firm in the principles of mid-Victorian Liberalism, and fond of ordering everybody about) asks Stephen for advice, dictating to him what he shall advise. Her difficulty is to get money to provide

dowries for her two marriageable daughters, Sarah—who is colourless, and engaged to an ordinary "society" fool without final "g's," Charles Lomax—and Barbara—a Salvationist major, engaged to Adolphus Cusins, a Professor of Greek, who has joined the Salvation Army (as big drum) in order to be near his beloved. (Greek scholars, we are told, are privileged; few of them know Greek, and none of them know anything else; but Professor Cusins knows how to win the way to Barbara's heart.) Lady Britomart in the end advises herself to apply for the necessary funds to her husband Andrew, millionaire and manufacturer of torpedoes, guns, aerial battleships, explosives, and all known implements of destruction. She has separated from Andrew because she cannot agree with him as to the future disposal of the Undershaft business. Stephen is her candidate; but Andrew feels bound by the time-honoured tradition of the Undershafts, which is to leave the business to an adopted foundling. In this he proudly likens the line of Undershafts to the Antonine Emperors, who always adopted their successors. Another cause of dissension between husband and wife is Andrew's queer attitude in regard to morality. While all the rest of the world practise immorality, but own themselves in the wrong by preaching morality, Andrew practises morality and preaches immorality. This is only the Whig and mid-Victorian way of stating that Andrew, as we shall by and by see, is a Nietzschean. Andrew visits Lady Britomart at her invitation, and is introduced to the family which has grown up in his absence. Of course he takes every gentleman in the room for his son except the right one (this is Mr. Shaw's little gibe at the old *voix du sang*), and finds the right one quite uninteresting when he does know him. His interest is,

in fact, concentrated on Barbara. Himself the master of a vast concern, he would like to know all about the organisation of the Salvation Army. Barbara, on her side, catches fire at the idea of "saving" her father's "soul," and invites him to the Barracks. Agreed; provided that, in return, she will visit her father's workshops. And the question is—Will Barbara convert Andrew to Salvationism or Andrew convert Barbara to the Gospel of Power? Barbara is confident of her own success and waxes enthusiastic over her faith. "Really, Barbara," interrupts Lady Britomart, "you speak as if religion were a pleasant subject"—and, as a wholesome corrective, orders family prayers. But all the children follow Andrew to the drawing-room, and the poor mother is left alone lamenting the decline and fall of sound mid-Victorian principles. And that is the first Act.

Act II. passes in the West Ham Shelter of the Salvation Army. We are introduced to various types of converts. There are a pair of hypocrites who invent past wickedness in order to get more credit for the present regeneration. "Where would they get the money from if we were to let on as we're no worse than other people?" The male hypocrite has the glory of "confessing" on platforms. The female one jealously deplores that "*our* confession 'as to be whispered.'" A third convert is a freethinker and an honest workman, turned out of his job because his hair is (prematurely) grey; he accepts charity only as a loan, but cannot help admiring the missionary zeal of the Salvation major. "Ah, if you'd only read Tom Paine in a proper spirit!" A fourth convert is a drunken brute who "bashes" women before our eyes—so brutally that one wishes Professor Cusins had

inculcated Mr. Shaw with the Aristotelian principle about  $\tau\ddot{o}\ \mu\acute{a}pov$ . Well, the Salvationist lasses, cruelly smitten, turn the other cheek and pray for the smiter, and Professor Cusins, "a sort of collector of religions, and inclined to believe in them all," delivers a panegyric on Salvationism, which he compares to the worship of Dionysos. Andrew Undershaft, not to be outdone by a wealthy distiller, gives the army a cheque for £5000, and is even preparing to join the procession with a trombone—when Barbara suddenly stops the way. She has seen the army, in terrible straits for money, take alms from the distiller and the gun manufacturer. It is in vain that her father preaches the beneficent influences of war. It is in vain that he defends alcohol—alcohol which "enables Parliament to do at eleven o'clock at night what no sane person would do at eleven o'clock in the morning." Barbara cannot believe in a religion even indirectly based on drunkenness and murder. And that is the second act.

In the third we start with a discussion between Lady Britomart and her husband as to their son Stephen's future profession. "He knows nothing and thinks he knows everything." "That, clearly," says Andrew, "points to a political career." But Stephen interpolates some fine stereotyped phrases about the British character. "Ah," says Stephen, "now we know what to do with you, my boy; you are a born journalist." Whereupon they all depart to inspect the Undershaft machine-shops and model-town (with everything up-to-date, including Ethical Societies and a William Morris Labour Church), and to listen to interminable speeches from Undershaft himself on the Armourer's Faith, the Gospel of Power, and other Nietzschean gimcracks. We learn how poverty is the

worst of all crimes, how rent (and half a dozen other economic things which I forget) are the Seven Deadly Sins, and how we ought to treat the old morality as Undershaft treats outworn battleships or obsolete guns. "Morality that doesn't fit the facts — 'scrap' it!" Finally, when they have all talked themselves out (it is at this stage that you begin to feel tired), Professor Cusins is taken into the Undershaft business (if not exactly a "foundling" he is the next thing to it, as his father married his deceased wife's sister) and gets the hand of Barbara. Though Barbara has renounced Salvationism, we are to understand that she still retains her missionary zeal. She will convert her father's model-town to some faith or other, one knows not exactly what. For, as she candidly warns her Adolphus, she would never make a stay-at-home wife. "There are larger loves and diviner dreams than the fireside ones." And that is the end.

Mr. Shaw has certainly justified his sub-title of "discussion," and he has discussed everything under the sun : Salvationism, Whiggism, Parliament, the Press, University education, the choice of a profession, the philosophy of war, alcohol, charity, Donizetti's music, Greek scholarship, English slang, courtship and matrimony, the manufacture of explosives, *quicquid agunt homines*. It is all very "Shavian," very bewildering, very suggestive in its flashes of shrewd sense, very amusing in its long stretches of March-hare madness (until they become too long), and absolutely undramatic throughout.

## THE DOCTOR'S DILEMMA

(COURT, November 1906)

"I'VE lost the thread of my remarks," says one of Mr. Shaw's physicians; "what was I talking about?" Mr. Shaw himself might say this, or something very like it. True, he does not helplessly lose the thread of his play. But he is continually dropping it, in order that he may start a fresh topic. This foible of discursiveness has been steadily gaining on him. *John Bull* was more discursive than *Man and Superman*. *Major Barbara* was more discursive than *John Bull*. *The Doctor's Dilemma* is more discursive than *Major Barbara*. Needless to point out that this discursiveness is not a new method, but a "throwing back" to a very old method. It was, for instance, the method of Shakespeare. A certain unity of idea does, however, underlie Mr. Shaw's new play, and that is to be found in its satire of the medical profession. Therein he has been anticipated by Brieux in his *L'Évasion*. But of course the theme belongs, as of right, to Molière. Is there not something piquant in the spectacle of Mr. Shaw applying Shakespearian treatment to a Molièreen theme? After all, there is no such thoroughgoing classicist as your professed iconoclast.

Superficially, no doubt, we seem to have travelled a long way from the buffooneries of M. Purgon and

M. Diafoirus. Only superficially, however. For the old mock-Latin, for the clysters, for the instruments which modern delicacy does not permit to be named, we now have barbarous Greek—opsonin and phagocytosis—surgical saws and “nuciform sacs.” *Plus ça change plus c'est la même chose.* That, by the way, is the criticism which, in effect, the oldest of Mr. Shaw's physicians, Sir Patrick Cullen, is always applying to the new-fangled discoveries of his fellow-practitioners. He has seen all these “novelties” before; they have their law of periodicity—say, once in every fifteen years—and nothing is altered but the names. Sir Patrick, who stands for bluff cynical comment on scientific affectation, heads a group of half a dozen medical types. There is Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonnington—familiarly known as “old B. B.”—Court physician (much liked by what he invariably calls “the Family”) and platitudinously pompous bungler. He is, as you see, an entirely Molièresque figure. Good easy man, he does not know the difference between a vaccine and an antitoxin, and is all for stimulating the phagocytes. There is Sir Colenso Ridgeon—just knighted as the curtain rises for his great “opsonin” discovery—who is all for buttering the bacilli. There is the great surgeon, Cutler Walpole, who in every human ill sees blood-poisoning, and is all for cutting out the “nuciform sac.” Physic he bluntly characterises as “rot”; the physicians, in return, dismiss surgery as mere “manual labour.” There remain two types not anticipated by Molière; Leo Schutzmacher, who has made a fortune in the East End by selling advice and drugs for sixpences, under the sign “cure guaranteed,” and Dr. Blenkinsop, a hard-working general practitioner

who has never succeeded in making both ends meet and begs fashionable consultants for their cast-off frock-coats. All these people display their several humours in a Queen Anne Street consulting-room, whither they have come to congratulate Sir Colenso Ridgeon on his Birthday Honour. The irony of the thing is that Sir Colenso's knighthood is the fruit of one of "old B. B.'s" most glaring blunders in treating one of "the Family." The disheartened and disgusted Ridgeon remarks, in an "aside," "Ours is not a profession, but a conspiracy."

Why not call it, rather, a procession? For that is what it turns out to be in the conduct of Mr. Shaw's play. Our bevy of doctors career through the play, always together (one wonders what becomes of their unfortunate patients), like the wedding guests in the *Chapeau de Paille d'Italie*. From Queen Anne Street their line of march takes them to the Star and Garter at Richmond, and thence to Louis Dubedat's studio. But who is Louis Dubedat? It is time that he was mentioned here, though it is a whole hour by the clock—an hour devoted to the exhibition and discussion of medical humours—before you hear of him in the theatre. Louis Dubedat is an artist with a tuberculous lung. Please keep one eye fixed on the art and the other on the lung, for these are the two separate elements out of which Mr. Shaw makes his play. Examine the lung first, for that *motif* still continues the original thesis—medical humbug. Louis Dubedat is the *corpus vile* on which the medical experiments are to be made. Jennifer Dubedat, Louis's wife, has sought out Sir Colenso Ridgeon, and, with great difficulty, secured his promise to undertake the case. When Ridgeon consents it is

really out of his profound (but entirely discreet) admiration for Jennifer, an idealist from Cornwall, a child of nature, to whom belief in Louis's genius is a religion. But Ridgeon's consent at once places him in a dilemma. He has only staff and accommodation for ten cases, and all his beds are full. If he takes in Louis, he must dismiss (practically to certain death) one of the original ten; life for life. Nevertheless, knowing what he does of Jennifer, and knowing as yet nothing of Louis, he consents. As soon as he gets to know Louis the case is altered. Now is the time for you to remember that Louis is an artist as well as a sick man. You find that he is a particular kind of artist—the non-moral artist, a man without any sense of conduct, to whom the words "right" and "wrong," as ordinarily understood, have no meaning. Think of him as a Pierrot, or as a Faun. *Imprimis*, he belongs to Elia's great race of borrowers. Invited to meet the doctors (in a body, of course) he "touches" each of them for a loan. *Item*, he is a bigamist. *Item*, he is a blackmailer. That people should reprobate these practices is a thing he cannot even begin to understand. When the doctors arrive (always in a body) to upbraid him, he sits down and quietly sketches them. He gaily declares himself to be a disciple of Bernard Shaw, a celebrity unknown to Sir Patrick Cullen, who, however, promptly finds in him a moral likeness to John Wesley.

And now Sir Colenso is in a worse dilemma than ever. For he finds that his poor *confrère*, the morally irreproachable Dr. Blenkinsop, has also a tuberculous lung. Which is he to save? The good Blenkinsop, who is a social failure, or the bad Dubedat, who paints good pictures? Good men are fairly common, he

argues. Good pictures are very rare. And he decides in favour of Dubedat. But here there is a fresh complication. Jennifer Dubedat's whole life consists in the worship of Louis. If Louis ceased to be her hero, she would commit suicide—has, indeed, already marked out a certain cliff in Cornwall for that purpose. To prolong Dubedat's life is to ensure that his wife shall sooner or later find him out, and so have her religion shattered and lose her own life into the bargain. Therefore, for Jennifer's sake (even although, to the vulgar mind, it may look like murdering a man in the hope of marrying his widow) Sir Colenso must let Louis die. “Rather hard that a lad should be killed because his wife has too high an opinion of him” is old Sir Patrick's comment; “fortunately very few of us are in that predicament.”

Killed, however, Louis is. Killed because he is handed over by Sir Colenso, the only man who could save him (with magical opsonin butter for the bacilli), to “old B. B.” who doesn't know the difference between a vaccine and an antitoxin. Louis dies, or fades away, before our eyes, with his head on Jennifer's breast (as Duse dies on Armand's in the last act of *La Dame*), dies like one of Montaigne's Emperors “in a jest,” chaffing the doctors all round and uttering his artist's *credo* with his last breath—“I believe in Michael Angelo and Rembrandt and Velasquez and the Message of Art.” Incorrigible Pierrot, unregenerate Faun! *Qualis artifex pereo*, he might have said. But instead of that he says let there be no horrible crape, let not his wife mar her beauty with tears; he hates widows, she must promise him to marry again. Also he gives a plain hint that he understands Sir Colenso's game. So does Jennifer,

who coldly dismisses Sir Colenso from the death-chamber. Amateurs of the morbid will revel in this realistic death-scene. Other people will dislike it as bad taste and cheap art. Bad taste in its punctuation of solemnity by jokes (for there is a touch of the Pierrot and the Faun in Mr. Shaw himself). Cheap art in its employment of such a fact as death (realistic, not poetised death) to secure an emotional thrill; a thrill which, from the very constitution of human nature, is bound to come without any reference to the skill of the artist. Mr. Shaw made a like mistake in the face "bashing" scene of *Major Barbara*. But it is useless to argue with him over these things. He will do them. All we can do is to be sorry.

There is a brief, quaint, not entirely comprehensible, epilogue. Jennifer and Sir Colenso meet at Louis Dubedat's posthumous "One man show." Sir Colenso, treated with cold disdain, is driven to try and open Jennifer's eyes to the truth about her dead hero. He fails utterly. The secret of his love for her pops out. She mocks at the idea of love in this "elderly gentleman"—a new view of himself for Sir Colenso. Besides, in deference to her hero's dying injunction, she has already married again. The curtain descends while we are still wondering who is Jennifer's second husband. Can it be the well-groomed manager of the Art Gallery?

A thoroughly "Shavian" play, this, stimulating and diverting for the most part, occasionally distressing, now and then bewildering. O philosopher! O humorist! you mutter with gratitude. And then you whisper, with a half sigh, O Pierrot! O Faun!

## *THE PHILANDERER*

(COURT, February 1907)

M R. SHAW never shirks a challenge. A friend challenged him to write about Don Juan, and he produced *Man and Superman*. Another friend challenged him to write about death, and he produced *The Doctor's Dilemma*. Has he no friend who will challenge him to produce a wordless play? It would be a wholesome discipline for him and might be a joy for us. His people would then be forced to show us what they are, and from their conduct we should judge them. At present they only tell us what they are, explain their own conduct with the aid of a lecturer's wand or by the process of question and answer, or else jump out of their skins and deliver impartial judgments on themselves as though they were somebody else. Now and then Shakespeare's people did that—as when Richard Crookback said, "I am determined to be a villain." But what Shakespeare did out of inadvertence Mr. Shaw does deliberately. He has yet to learn that action and emotion do not exist dramatically just because someone says that he has done this or felt that. His people analyse their passions with a logic so complete as to convince you that they have no passions to analyse. The great passions are mute; the others are only semi-articulate, and never auto-analytical. In the club scene of *The Philanderer* Dr.

Paramore says to Charteris, who is plaguing him with inopportune talk, "Allow me to call your attention to *that*." "That" is the word SILENCE placarded on the wall. It would do Mr. Shaw a world of good to keep that placard on his desk. Let him try to invent a few people who hold their tongues, at any rate about themselves.

Are, then, self-expository characters to be entirely banished from the stage? By no means. There are, at least, two legitimate uses for them. Their first legitimate use is in a fantastic play, where every character shamelessly reveals itself for exactly what it is or naïvely gives itself away. See *The Palace of Truth* and the Gilbertian theatre *passim*. Mr. Gilbert made his people do this precisely because it is what real people do not do; the essence of this kind of art is a surprising and grotesque departure from life. Mr. Shaw makes his people do it because he cannot help it, and in situations which are intended not to depart from life but to adhere closely to it, to give its very form and pressure. Raina Petkoff does it. Mrs. Warren does it. The hero of *Man and Superman* does it. Louis Dubedat does it. Charteris in *The Philanderer* does it. They all do it. And why? Because Mr. Shaw does it himself. In his letters to the newspapers, in his platform addresses, in his prefaces, on every occasion on which he speaks in his own person he speaks as a man who with unblushing frankness gives himself away. That is the secret of his method, the quintessence of Shavianism. And what Mr. Shaw does in his own person, he cannot help doing through the persons of his plays.

But there is another legitimate use for the self-expository character, and legitimate, this time, in the

drama of adherence to real life. There is a certain type of person in real life who *is* self-expository, whose nature may hardly be said to exist until it has come to the stage of being expounded, whose feelings do not come into play so much for their own sake as for the sake of being analysed. Of this type, as we have seen, Mr. Shaw is himself a brilliant example. As, then, self-expository men exist, Mr. Shaw may say he is entitled to put their images on the stage. Yes. Mr. Shaw is fully entitled to make a stage-hero of the self-expository man; but he does it at his risks and perils. For we, his audience, are also entitled to say that the type is not well chosen, that it is not suitable to the subject-matter of the play, that we get no pleasure out of seeing it just where it is and doing just what it does. That is my own feeling about the eponymous hero of *The Philanderer*. I get no pleasure out of him. Charteris is a man perpetually shilly-shallying between two women, or rather pursued by one woman while he pursues another. Yesterday he was "carrying on" with Julia, but is now tired of her and is "making up" to Grace. I say "carrying on" and "making up" because I do not quite know in what category of amorous relation I am to place the two pairs. Perhaps "walking out" would be a more apt phrase, for the behaviour of the parties too often suggests the manners of "downstairs." There is a good deal of hugging and kissing, but apparently everybody's intentions are to be understood as conventionally "honourable." Charteris sometimes alludes to his proceedings as "philandering," sometimes as "sweethearting." Julia, on the other hand, talks of having been "the slave of his passion" for her. Queer as the behaviour of these very osculatory ladies is, we are to understand that

they are technically virtuous. We do not quite know where we are ; but let us be charitable and take it to be all an affair of "courtship"—courtship with a rather unusual allowance of caressing. Charteris, then, is courting Grace, in order to escape being courted by Julia. He talks of "loving" Grace, but evidently loves no one but himself. But what he loves even better than himself is the sound of his own voice. He is for ever expounding, now to Julia, now to Grace, now to both together, the nature of the emotions which they, individually and collectively, have inspired, do inspire, or may possibly inspire in him.

Mr. Shaw says that this is just the sort of thing the women like. Tired of being treated with the respect "due to their sex," they are fascinated by any man who will treat them on frank and equal terms. Charteris's idea of frank and equal terms is for the man to punctuate long and argumentative discourses with perfunctory kisses.

"Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?"

Perhaps this is a specimen of *l'amour psychique* that Professor Bellac used to talk about. The Duchess did not believe Bellac, and we do not believe Charteris. We do not believe a word he says, and, further, we find him a bore. That is the worst of putting your self-expository man on the stage. The glibness of the self-exposition soon ceases to amuse us, and we look for our interest to the quality of the self-expounded. Now the fact is, the self in this case, the true inwardness of Charteris, is not interesting. He might have been interesting if he had had enough stuff in him to be a real blackguard. But he has not "betrayed" Julia, he has simply been "philandering" with her—

some sort of grown-up boy and girl nonsense. He might be interesting if he had a spark of real love for Grace; but he has not. He is simply a kind of voluble jackass who has wasted his time dangling round women or letting them dangle round him in order that he may chatter to them about emotions which he does not, in fact, feel. Well, says Mr. Shaw, that is just the sort of man a "philanderer" *is*, and I have put him on the stage for you to see. We answer that the sight of him gives us no pleasure, that his chatter wearies us, and that the empty insincerity of the principal character spoils the whole play.

Nor are the other characters of any compensating importance. Julia stands for the "womanly woman"; she is not, she is merely one of Mr. Shaw's shrews. Grace stands for the late Victorian "new woman," a type now so utterly forgotten that one looks upon the character to-day as rather more outrageously fantastic than one of Molière's *précieuses ridicules*. (There is an "Ibsen Club" in the play, and much talk of "Ibsenism"—oh! those remote 'nineties! Here is a play hardly more than a dozen years old, and yet already out of date and even *rococo*!) The only amusing characters are those who stand outside the "philandering" story—two heavy fathers, one of whom is an anti-Ibsenite sentimentalist (a caricature, not unkind, of a real person, now dead) and the other the luckless victim of a medical blunder. Dr. Paramore has discovered a new disease of the liver, and diagnoses its fatal presence in Colonel Craven. The colonel gives up meat and drink and resigns himself to a speedy death from "Paramore's disease." By and by it is conclusively proved that there is no such disease. Rage and despair of Paramore, aggravated by what he considers the

indecent joy of the Colonel — a scene that tells us, what we knew before, that Mr. Shaw has a true gift for Molièresque comedy. On the whole, however, the play is one of Mr. Shaw's least happy experiments.

## ELEONORA DUSE

### *LA GIOCONDA*

(May 1900)

GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO dedicates his tragedy of *La Gioconda* to Eleonora Duse "dalle belle mani," and it is in these beautiful hands that the fate of the tragedy lies. Hardly has Silvia Settala entered when attention is directed to her hands. "Care mani," says Silvia's old friend Lorenzo Gaddi, the sculptor, "coraggiose e belle, sicure e belle!" They rival the famous hands of the "donna dal mazzolino" of Verrocchio. Her husband should carve them in marble and hang them up as an *ex-voto* for his rescue from death. For he, too, Lucio Settala, is a sculptor, and it is to his wife's loving care that he owes his recovery from the wound he has inflicted on himself. It was in a moment of passionate despair. He was the victim of a love bordering on frenzy for Gioconda Danti, his model, and the inspiration of his art. Was? Perhaps he still is, notwithstanding his renewed love, born of gratitude, for his wife, who is in an agony of doubt because she knows the other woman is still at hand, implacable, waiting to draw Lucio back into her net. For the moment Silvia's doubt is set at rest by her husband's protestation of devotion, but we see, what she does not, that the fever of the old love is still upon him. In a scene with his friend Cosimo Dalbo

—D'Annunzio does not disdain the employment of confidants—Lucio confesses the truth. He adores his wife. Hers is a soul of inestimable price. “Ma io non scolpisco le anime,” he cries; he is not a sculptor of souls. This woman with the beautiful soul was not meant for him. Whereas the other will furnish him, not with one statue, but with thousands. When he saw her he thought of all the blocks of marble in the flanks of distant mountains, “per la volontà di fermare in ciascuno un suo gesto.” And Lucio pours forth the fervour of his love for Gioconda, which to him means love for his art, the worship of plastic beauty, everything, in short, for which he lives. Even now, it seems, Gioconda is serving the cause of Lucio's art. She comes every day to his deserted studio to preserve his last unfinished statue by keeping the clay wet. But, interjects his friend, while Gioconda has been saving your statue, Silvia has been saving your life! Lucio's reply reveals the “absolute artist”: “Quale delle due cose ha maggior pregio?” It is not permissible to argue with sculptors, or it might have been pointed out that the saving of an unfinished statue would be useless unless the sculptor's life had been saved too.

At this stage Silvia's instinct warns her that her husband is not safe so long as the other woman still holds the key of the studio. She determines then to confront her, wrest the key from her, and drive her forth. The second act has now closed, and, save for one brief minute, we shall see the husband no more. It is the turn of the two women, rivals for the man's love, to come face to face and to fight it out. A great scene it should be—a *scène-à-faire*, as M. Sarcey would have called it, if ever there was one—and a great scene it is. The wife stands, silent, posed as nobly as any

of the statues around her, while the other woman opens the studio door. There is a moment's pause, then "Io sono Silvia Settala," says the wife. "Voi?" "Which of us is the intruder? Is it I, perhaps?" "Perhaps," answers the other woman; and proceeds to make good her retort. For this studio is not the home of the domestic virtues. It is outside common laws and rights. Here a sculptor makes his statues. "And I, Gioconda, am naught here save an instrument of his art." Nature has sent her to him to bring him a message and to serve him. She is here to serve him at this moment. This is no vulgar quarrel, it will be seen. D'Annunzio fairly assigns to each side in the struggle its point of view and its complete case. And now a sudden temptation comes to the baffled and tortured Silvia; a temptation which D'Annunzio calls "*la fatalità antica della menzogna.*" Silvia lies. She tells her rival that she has been sent to dismiss her by Lucio himself, and she lies so thoroughly that Gioconda is convinced. "Then," cries Gioconda, roused in her turn to fury, "I will destroy the statue, *my* statue, made with the life he wrung out of me drop by drop." As Gioconda rushes to destroy the statue, Silvia follows her to save it. She does save it, but at terrible cost. Her hands, her beautiful, sure hands are crushed into a shapeless mass. Clumsy or brutal stage-management, it need hardly be said, might have made this incident a thing of horror; but Signora Duse keeps it rigidly within the limits of true art. It is the pity of the tragedy which smites the heart, not the horror.

After this terrible scene we must have peace, and the last act is strangely peaceful, touched with poetic fantasy, infinitely pathetic. The poor maimed creature, in a robe which conceals her handless wrists, is alone

by the sea, conversing with a half-crazed peasant girl, La Sirenetta, who tells her the rhyme of the Seven Sisters and their fates :—

“Eravamo sette sorelle  
Ci specchiamo alle fontane :  
Eravamo tutte belle.”

But where are her hands, asks La Sirenetta, the beautiful hands she had so often kissed? “I have given them,” is the answer, “to my love.” La Sirenetta would offer Silvia her own hands, were they not so rough and brown; and Silvia’s reply shows that D’Annunzio is true poet as well as playwright—“Sono felice le tue mani,” they can touch the leaves and the flowers and earth and water and the stones and the children and animals and all innocent things. And now Silvia is waiting. Not for her husband; he has left her—since the “absolute artist” can be a miserable cur—for La Gioconda. It is for her child Beata that Silvia is waiting—Beata whom she has not seen since the loss of her hands. When Beata runs in she offers her mother flowers, which the poor woman cannot take. “Why don’t you take me in your arms, mother, and clasp me tight?” And the mother sinks slowly upon her knees in speechless agony.

D’Annunzio’s style has marmorean dignity and purity and polish. There are passages of prose in it which are a sheer delight as beautiful sound, apart from the feeling and thought which have their own beauty too. And one must use the same word for Signora Duse’s performance; it is entirely beautiful. In the crises of tragic frenzy, as in the interspaces of pure pathos, she never forsakes the eternal principle of great art, the principle of beauty.

## *FRANCESCA DA RIMINI*

(ADELPHI, October 1903)

*D*U Sang, de la Volupté et de la Mort—the strange name which Maurice Barrès has given to one of his strange books—might serve as a sub-title for the *Francesca da Rimini* of Gabriele d'Annunzio. The play reeks of blood. The roses over which Francesca bends in the first scene are dyed a deeper red with blood.

“È il miracolo del sangue!”

she cries. Rose-red and blood-red—there you have the colours of the whole play. For this vivid colour scheme there must, of course, be maintained a pitch of violent emotion. The men, all save Paolo, are wild beasts. Ostasio, Francesca's brother, cannot question a harmless, necessary jester without half-strangling him. For a sneering word he stabs his bastard-brother Bannio in the cheek. (It is Bannio's blood which stains Francesca's roses. Smaragdi, the slave, has mopped it up and poured it into the Byzantine sarcophagus that holds them.) Paolo's younger brother Malatestino is a demon of cruelty. He tortures a prisoner, then cuts off his head and carries it about in a ghastly bundle. All this violence and “human gore” cunningly prepares one for the final slaughter. We are to feel that Gianciotto's murder of his wife and

her lover, almost by the same sword-stroke, was just a typical thirteenth-century affair. Francesca herself is quite used to violence and blood. On the battlements she plays with Greek fire, will not go away when the arrows begin to fall round her, and declares her love for a good fight—

“È bello il combattente alla battaglia.”

She buckles on her husband's gorget as one quite used to it. Blood-red, then, is the dominant colour of the tragedy.

Blood-red—but also rose-red. For against the violence of the passions, the general ferocity and cruelty, you have to set the suavity of D'Annunzio's verse—rich and even (like Mr. Fred Bayham's conversation) “sumptuous,” but always beautiful, always a feast for the ear. Beauty the whole play assuredly has, the beauty of roses and the beauty of blood. Even young Malatestino, with his chopper and with only one eye, is not without a certain savage beauty. To the beauty of every form of energy D'Annunzio has always shown himself peculiarly susceptible, and this feeling for beauty he gives to all his characters. Not only Paolo, but Gianciotto and Malatestino are the slaves of Francesca's beauty. The most passionate speech of her brother Ostasio is a panegyric of that. When she herself plays with the Greek fire it is not for the sport of danger, but that she may intoxicate herself with its beauty—

“Questa fiamma è tanto  
bella che me ne sento inebriata.”

See, too, how voluptuously she caresses the rich stuffs which the merchant has brought her. Musicians are in

her train. She lives for beauty. What is the glory for her of Paolo if it be not that he is "Il Bello"? Do not the pair (in Hedda Gabler's phrase) "die beautifully"? D'Annunzio, then, in this play always makes for beauty—the beauty of suavity and the beauty of violence and death. The red of the rose and the red of blood. It is a blend peculiarly Italian and, what is more, peculiarly D'Annunzian.

Next to this primary sensation, the sensation of a rich, sensuous, multicoloured and flamboyant beauty, one gets a sensation of drama. That order, it will be said, is a covert condemnation of the play, inasmuch as the essence of great drama is, before everything, to make a dramatic appeal. The truth—surely an obvious truth—is, that the story of Francesca da Rimini and Paolo il Bello is not a first-rate subject for drama. Of course, the catastrophe—like any other scene of sudden death—is dramatic enough; but a catastrophe is only the end of a play, not the play itself. The play itself must be the story of a gradual drifting into a guilty passion, and, do what you will, you cannot make that drifting dramatic in itself. Do what you will, you cannot make Paolo anything but a stick, a beautiful stick. Further, your cardinal scene must be a transfer to the stage of the famous passage from Dante about the lovers' kiss over the book. You cannot escape that scene; the play without that scene would be *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark. You may make that scene a thing of beauty, as D'Annunzio does; but neither D'Annunzio nor anyone else can make that scene dramatic. But D'Annunzio's handling of the whole story is more dramatic than the handling of anyone else. The sudden confrontation of Francesca and Paolo at the

end of the first act, with never a word spoken, is highly dramatic. There is no need for words. The twain stand spellbound. The woman hands the man a rose, a blood-stained rose. All the story to come is there. The second act, the fighting on the ramparts, if not dramatic, is full of bustle and excitement. Its one *raison d'être* as drama is that it reveals to Paolo, supposed to be wounded, the secret of Francesca's passion. Only half-dramatic, again, the third act; but it had to be there, as I have said, for the sake of the cardinal scene, the scene of the kiss and the book. In the fourth act the dramatic pulse beats hot and fierce. It is the act of Malatestino's lust for blood and his treacherous betrayal of Francesca. D'Annunzio's invention of this one-eyed traitor, Malatestino "dall'occhio," is an admirable invention. What more natural than his jealous denunciation of his sister, after he has been himself repulsed by her? He strikes the note of drama, then, as well as the note of horror. The scene of his avowal to his brother, when Gianciotto, all in armour, nearly crushes the life out of him in his fierce eagerness to know the truth, is the finest in the play. When people say, as many people do, that Gabriele d'Annunzio lacks the true faculty of the dramatist, I would ask them what other name than true dramatist is to be found for the man who conceived and wrote this scene? The final scene, too, following the authentic story in which Paolo, seeking to escape, is caught by his tunic in the trap-door, is the most dramatic arrangement of any that one has seen. Of course, the original intractability of the subject remains. It cannot be turned into first-rate drama—the drama of uninterrupted and cumulative interest. D'Annunzio has done the next best thing—he has filled out the

story with the *maximum* number of poignantly dramatic episodes. His rose-red and his blood-red are never "still-life" colours. There is no stagnation.

As for Signora Duse, it is the beauty of the play rather than the drama of it that she fastens upon and chiefly illustrates. In passages of beauty she is perfection itself. There is such a passage in the first act, wherein Francesca describes her little sister Samaritana the "piccola colomba," and one again in the second, wherein Francesca describes the wild beauty of Greek fire and her joy in it—to listen to these was to hear the most exquisite music. In the scene over the lectern it was wonderful to watch the changes of her face and the "passions de l'amour," to use Pascal's phrase, following fast upon one another there. But when she had a passage not so much of beauty as of dramatic force to deliver, as in her description to the slave Smaragdi of her terrible dream, she was far less satisfactory—dwelling almost exclusively on the musical beauty of the lines and almost ignoring the force and terror of them. If the truth must out, a simple semi-archaic type, a Francesca, a figure of little else than plastic and musical beauty, does not enable her to put forth her best and truest powers. This is by no means to say that her Francesca is not in its way a supremely exquisite thing.

## *LA SECONDA MOGLIE*

(WALDORF, May 1905)

SIGNORA DUSE is in London once again, and once again revitalises our theatrical emotions for us and resumes from the moment she enters the scene all her old spell. There may be changes to be noted by the curious in this our great enchantress, but they are merely trivial, external changes—a slightly heightened complexion, perhaps, and a more luxuriant *coiffure*. These are details for the gossips. All one cares about is the welcome certainty that there is no loss of magic—the magic of the thrilling voice and the nervous gesture, and the wonderful play of glance and feature. Out of compliment to her audience, or, maybe, with the aim of being more readily understood by those who have no Italian, Signora Duse makes her re-entry in an English play. For my part I should have welcomed any other choice. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is, no doubt, a first-rate specimen of our modern English drama, but I have a vague feeling that Signora Duse in this English drama is like a 'Varsity oar in a College eight—somewhat too magnificent an instrument for a comparatively humble piece of work. To vary the figure, one does not care to see a great virtuoso performing on a cottage piano. Was Paula Tanqueray, the ex-Mrs. Jarman, really so splendid, so

romantic a figure as this? I cannot believe it. She would have set all Surrey by the ears, or, rather, have turned it into some poetic place of the South, an Alban lake or a Borromean isle. This is no Mrs. Tanqueray, who "adores fruit, especially when it is expensive," but an exotic orchidaceous creature with the enigmatic smile of a Da Vinci portrait and tones in her voice that are echoed from a *Straduarius*. It is not Paula fondling and caressing Aubrey, but some Vivien beguiling Merlin. In a word Signora Duse inevitably poetises the prose of the play, and so warps it from its real nature; making it, to be sure, something much more glorious, but at the same time much less true. Paula Tanqueray was a vulgar "fast" woman, promoted from a "shy" villa to Anglican respectability, whereas this is some beautiful strange monster let loose among mortal men. When she is joyous there are "harps in the air," when sad, her weeping is like a convulsion of nature. She has rapid tragic moments that seem like acted readings in Dante. As when Paula, cast once more into the presence of Ardale, and with her secret divined by her step-daughter, declares that her past is written indelibly upon her face—and accompanies her words with a sudden gesture that chills the blood of the onlooker. Such art, or rather such a temperament, as this seems to cry aloud for the ample scope of some part of high romance, where everything shall inevitably be "in the grand style." In the grand style all that Eleonora Duse does is inevitably done; so that, as I have said, she drives this prosaic English part out of its nature, and you are reminded throughout of the feat which Goldsmith attributed to Johnson of "making little fishes talk like big whales." It is a wonderful thing to see, a kaleido-

scopic show of varying emotions that each communicate to the spectator their little thrill of pity or terror or delight; but it is no more Mrs. Tanqueray than the Colossus of Rhodes is one of the frock-coated statues on the Thames Embankment.

## *LA LOCANDIERA*

(WALDORF, June 1905)

NO doubt it is as a great tragic actress that Signora Duse will pass into history. Hers is the tragic mask, with its knitted brow and its mouth drawn down at the corners. She has gestures of physical disgust and revolt, as when she rubs the ignoble Gaston's kisses from her hand in *Visita di Nosze*, or the pinched face and "dead" voice of blank despair, as in the penultimate scene of *Seconda Moglie*, that are almost stifling with their tragic oppression. Yet those of us who have seen her as the Mirandolina of Goldoni will always put that memory of her before everything else; we shall say that, tragic actress though she may be by temperament and choice, it is in her one brief moment of comedy that she casts over us her most potent spell. For my own part, I count it a unique thing. Night after night, year after year, I have gone to theatre after theatre, and, though I have not found all barren, yet on the whole I should be inclined to sigh over a misspent life were it not for the thought of Duse in *La Locandiera*. For the sake of that one supreme pleasure I might be tempted to go through it all again. . . . It would be a great comfort if one could stop at this simple statement of fact. But it is the business of criticism to try to account for just such facts as these, to trace pleasure to its source, to

separate the components of the charm. Hopeless as such an adventure is in the present case, I must not shirk it.

The place is Florence. The time, mid-eighteenth century. Gentlemen, in the rich dress of the period, wear wigs of a higher arch over the brow than was our general English fashion. Our "macaronis" adopted it, however, evidently getting their perukes where they got their name. This little detail of the wig at once gives a touch of local colour. It may be said that, laid as the action is entirely within four walls, there is no sensation of place. But that is a mistake; you are always aware of the *genius loci* in Goldoni. A Venetian (whether by birth or not I forget, but certainly by frequentation), he generally affects Venice for his scene. This comedy, however, is too light and cheerful and innocent a thing for the decadent Venice of the period—that Venice of Casanova which Théophile Gautier had a morbid longing to have lived in. No; though you do not see it, you feel that the clear air of Florence is on the other side of those inn-walls, and that the gentlemen before you, the Count and the Marquis and the Cavaliere, may be on visiting terms with Sir Horace Mann. Count and Marquis, both in love with the hostess, Mirandolina, are snarling at one another. "Contea comprata!" sneers the Marquis. "Yes, I bought my county when you sold your marquisate" is the retort. The snuffy old Marquis, "povero e superbo," with his perpetual refrain of "Son chi sono," is delightfully played by Ettore Mazzanti; the Count has little more to do than to give him his cue. They amuse you until Mirandolina appears, and then you straightway forget them. She is in flowered brocade,

with a *sacque*—rather sumptuous attire, perhaps, for the landlady of an inn; I liked better the plain, chocolate-coloured gown, with a stiff hoop, in which she used to dress the part. But she wears the same coquettish little cap. You at once see that this is a landlady in a thousand—respectful without a tinge of servility, not above her business, and yet a perfect little lady, of the frank Italian sort. Between her two admirers she steers a clear course, not caring a fig for either of them, but too adroit to turn a too cold shoulder to "gentlefolk" customers. Her tact is perfect. Though her childlike delight in pretty toys breaks out unrestrainedly in hand-clapping and "*belli, belli,*" over the diamond earrings offered her by the Count, she is not overwhelmed by the magnificence of the gift; and when the Marquis, in his turn, offers her a common red handkerchief, though her eyes dance with fun, she shows no offended dignity. Her dignity is not tried until the Cavaliere appears—the bear, the professed woman-hater. He grumbles rudely at the inn-linen. She replies with quiet good-breeding, showing by look, not by speech, that she expects complaints of this sort to be made to the servants. She keeps her smile—the frankest, pleasantest smile I know—and, under her smile, resolves to teach the bear a lesson. For the honour of her outraged sex she will tame him and bring him to her feet.

This she announces, formally, to the audience, as she is seated alone on the stage. Deliciously naïve, blandly artificial, Goldoni! A little touch of this kind gives one all the joy of a genuine Chippendale chair-leg or a piece of *pâte tendre*. How can one hope to set down in printer's ink the details of Mirandolina's adventure? As well try to explain the mood of a midsummer day

in the humming blazing countryside by pointing to the Ordnance map ! But, groaning over what one cannot do, one must do what one can. First, then, she breaks down the outer barrier of the man's surliness by bringing him fresh linen herself—caressing its smooth surface, expatiating on the elegance of its pattern, till he finds it useless to try and silence her, and listens with a shrug. By and by he listens with attention ; she has begun to interest him. Then she asks him to give her his hand. Grudgingly he gives it, and, slyly looking into his face, she says, “ 'tis the first time I have the honour to take the hand of a man *che pensa veramente da uomo.*” The flattery begins to work. He sits at table, and she brings him dishes prepared by her own fair hand. He smacks his lips ; never was there such cookery ! She must take a chair, and drink with him. Never was there such burgundy ! (They drink it out of delightful squat decanters and gilt-edged stemless goblets that make the collector's mouth water.) For a moment the poor victim struggles against his fate. His only safety, he knows, is in flight ; and he keeps on muttering to himself, “ domani a Livorno ! ” He calls for his bill, but Mirandolina brings it with neatly simulated tears, and at the sight of her tears all his resolution fails. He calls her “ cara,” to his own dismay (“ *io cara ad una donna !* ”), and you can see her laughing on the side of her face which he cannot see.

And now she has had enough of it. She will show the man how he has been fooled. And so, when he comes to confess his love, he finds her at the ironing table, intent upon her work and receiving him with blank indifference. When he would utter impassioned speeches, she calls loudly for Fabrizio, the head-waiter, to bring another iron, and with the hot iron she contrives

to burn the Cavaliere's fingers. The Count and the Marquis enter, to find their woman-hating friend in a state of amorous frenzy. In his hot fit he would slay the Count for a gibe. It is time, thinks Mirandolina, to bring matters to an end. She blandly explains that she intends to marry Fabrizio, and *exit* the Cavaliere in a rage. "Mirandolina," says the Count, resuming the moral of the little tale, "voi siete una gran donna; voi avete l'abilità di condur gli uomini dove volete." Yes, "gran donna" is not too fine a style for this bewitching coquette. The delicious quality of it is that the coquetry is without any of the elaborate artifice, the leering archness, that the stage generally exhibits. Though Mirandolina absolutely pushes her little nose into the Cavaliere's face, leans caressingly against him, seems on the point of throwing herself into his arms, yet you feel throughout that it is all pure childlike fun; the woman is essentially modest and innocent. Mr. Meredith's phrase, now hackneyed, must be used once more; for it might have been invented for Signora Duse in Mirandolina. She is a "dainty rogue." In the epilogue which she speaks as they all join hands and come forward to the footlights (the old-fashioned conventionality of the play, its soliloquies, its "tags," and its epilogue only add to its charm), she speaks of things "dear to her within the limits *della convenienza e dell'onestà.*" It is Signora Duse's triumph to have guided the part always delicately and beautifully within those limits.

## SARAH BERNHARDT

### THE MORALIST

THE editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*<sup>1</sup> has accomplished a wonderful feat. He has induced Mme. Sarah Bernhardt to write an article, a real article fifteen pages long from title to facsimile signature, the only article she has ever written. You admire his business enterprise, and still more do you admire the intrepidity of his emissary, who has effected her purpose amid the most bewildering distractions. She found the actress under the electric light in her beautiful room of cream and gold (whither she had been transported in her original-looking little carriage drawn by chestnuts), clothed in a long white clinging ermine-trimmed dress, and surrounded by flowers, jewels, rich draperies, an image of Buddha, a bronze of Christ, M. Victorien Sardou in the flesh, a terrier, a greyhound, and a secretary. It was the secretary who first regained speech when the demand for an article fell into the midst of this dazzling scene like a thunderbolt. An article? "Never, never, has Madame done such a thing; articles have been written *on* her, but never *by* her [the italics are the secretary's]—it is impossible in her busy life for her to find the time to write herself." Yet the impossible has happened, and "Madame Sarah"

<sup>1</sup> December 1902, Art. "The Moral Influence of the Theatre."

(as her company always call her, with a blend of affection and respect which recalls the case of the Cabinet Ministers and "Mr. G.") has written her article.

Well, I have every desire to be impressed. I have read the article backwards and forwards and upside down, under the electric light, but all to no purpose: do what I will, I cannot find it impressive. I am driven to surmise that it lacks the proper surroundings; the flowers, and the jewels, and the long white clinging ermine-trimmed dress. Read without these enchanting accompaniments it falls flat. Platitudes which need no demonstration are mingled with judgments demonstrably false, or personal anecdotes which have nothing to do with the case. The interstices are filled with critical "howlers." It is all the fault of the enterprising magazine editor. He has destroyed a generous illusion. The world had willingly believed that, like Habakkuk according to Voltaire, Mme. Sarah was *capable de tout*, and now it appears that there is one thing she cannot do; she cannot make a contribution of real value to that old question "The Moral Influence of the Theatre."

She starts with a sweeping proposition. The influence of the theatre on morals has never been anything but beneficial. Evidently she has never heard of the Restoration drama or of the plays of Mrs. Aphra Behn, and has never found time to visit the Palais Royal. She supports her proposition by a pompous generality which proves nothing. "Beneficial it must always be to see the evolution of the human soul; and the more intelligently this evolution of the human soul is shown, the more effectual is the lesson drawn by those privileged to witness it." The evolution of some human souls is intelligently shown in *The Way*

*of the World* and *The Country Wife*, in *Une Parisienne* and *La Sensitive*. Is therefore its effect on those privileged to witness it beneficial? Mme. Bernhardt knows, like everybody else, that it is not, for she proceeds to deplore the existence of "so many pieces which do so much harm, as they familiarise the mind with vice without showing its immorality." She has thus triumphantly refuted herself.

The fact is that you cannot hope to defend the moral influence of the drama, unless you know something of the grounds on which it has been attacked; and you may search Mme. Bernhardt's article through without finding any trace of this knowledge. For certain types of mind and temper—types as various as Plato's and Charles Kingsley's, Pascal's and Dr. Parker's—the drama has always been immoral because it is not deliberately and directly moral. The religious enthusiast and the austere moralist, the saint and the Puritan, will always distrust a force which does not work in the sphere of direct morality. In the most moral drama its morality is a by-product; "disinterestedness" is an essential condition of æsthetic feeling; and "disinterestedness" will never be palatable to men who hold that the active will, the choice of strenuous and right conduct, should fill every moment of life. They cannot abide the "play-mood," the suspension of the serious business of living, which is the mood demanded by the drama. And even as a by-product the morality of the drama, as Coleridge pointed out, is seldom the higher morality, is seldom distinguishable from worldly prudence—and to the austere moralist that is only another name for immorality. The deadliest attacks on the theatre have come not from men like Jeremy Collier, who were simply content to prove that this or

that play was immoral, but from those who urged that the drama as an art, in its essence, was immoral. Mme. Bernhardt, it so chances, mentions one of these men, and she mentions him in such a way as to show herself innocent of any suspicion as to the "true inwardness" of his attack. "Jean Jacques Rousseau" she naïvely says, "appears not to have liked the theatre." So one might say that King Jamie appears not to have liked tobacco, or that Hampden appears not to have liked Ship-money, or that Borrow appears not to have liked the Jesuits. Rousseau's famous letter to D'Alembert "Sur les Spectacles" is, despite its crotchetts and exaggerations, one of the most formidable cases against the theatre ever penned. He pointed out the objection to dramatic emotion—the tragic "purging" of pity and terror—as an emotion which is an end in itself, an emotion which does not lead to action but makes a luxury of grief. The theatre, he said, flatters the passions; it changes neither feelings nor manners, it only reproduces them. What? It renders virtue amiable and vice odious? But reason could do that without it. We go to a tragedy because of the pleasure we take in seeing others suffer, so long as we do not suffer ourselves; we go to comedy because of the low pleasure we take in the consciousness of one another's infirmities. Then the theatre is a perpetual spectacle of love, and so inflames the most dangerous of the passions. It is a school of gallantry for men; and certainly not a school of modesty for women. Well, all this is, as we say nowadays, a little "steep"; but it would be idle to pretend that it is all nonsense. And it is certainly not to be disposed of by Mme. Bernhardt's quaint statement that Jean Jacques in reality "adored dramatic literature" until this taste "paled under

Diderot's cold and deadening influence." That exuberant sentimentalist Diderot "cold and deadening"! That enthusiast for the "moral theatre," the author of the *Fils Naturel* and the *Père de Famille*, Diderot, the man who deluded Rousseau into the belief that the theatre was immoral! Why, a mere consideration of dates—the letter to D'Alembert was published in the same year as the *Père de Famille* (1758)—but one must not be so clumsy as to import dates into that brilliant white and gold apartment, with its flowers and its jewels and its electric light.

In fact one is conscious of cutting a ludicrous figure in attempting to argue this subject on its merits with a charming lady (in a long white clinging ermine-trimmed dress) who gravely contends that *La Dame aux Camélias* is a piece which every young girl ought to be taken to see, that M. Sardou's *Fédora* is "a powerful sermon against revenge," not to be equalled by "many pages of philosophy," while M. Sardou, it appears, holds undisputed sway as Master of his Art. One is driven to turn to things more profitable, irrelevant though they are—Mme. Bernhardt's little personal anecdotes and confessions. She remembers that, when she first played Iphigénie at the Comédie Française and she held up her long thin arms for the sacrifice, the audience burst out laughing. She still feels nervous on the stage—especially over a new piece. She likes American and English audiences, because they take the theatre seriously, whereas the Latin nations do not. Nevertheless, the courtesy of the Spaniards is very charming, and "France retains the place of honour for literary works." Nor must one, in international comparisons, forget the society of the Entente Cordiale "at whose *soirée* I assisted in London," or the wild Iroquois in

Canada who once gave a *fête* in Mme. Sarah's honour. Also, "as a young girl I had serious thoughts of becoming a *religieuse*. It seemed an outlet for my soul, overflowing with exalted sentiment, in spite of my wayward and passionate temperament." But, fortunately, as things have turned out, instead of the cloister, you have the *boudoir* of cream and gold, with the flowers and the jewels and the image of Buddha and the terrier and the greyhound and "the fine intellectual rugged face of the great author" (who but M. Sardou?) expanding in "grateful acknowledgment to the grand interpreter of his artistic pen." Yes, the wayward and passionate temperament has done wonders, which we can all gratefully acknowledge—but it is too wayward a temperament to run into the mould of the magazine article.

## *ANDROMAQUE*

(ADELPHI, July 1903)

WE English have especial cause for gratitude to Racine for writing *Andromaque*. Namby-pamby Philips translated it into *The Distrest Mother*, a poor version—"poor but honest," however, like the parents of old-fashioned melodramatic heroines—and Namby-pamby Philips was a friend of Joseph Addison, who puffed the play in the *Spectator* and made it the pretext of an entirely delightful evening with Sir Roger de Coverley. Who can forget Sir Roger's remark about the heroine? "You can't imagine, sir, what it is to have to do with a widow." Or his comment on Hermione? "On my word, a notable young baggage." Or his views on Astyanax, who is always being heard of but never seen? "He owned he should have been very glad to have seen the little boy, who, says he, must needs be a very fine child by the account that is given of him." Before taking Sir Roger Mr. Spectator had gone to see *The Distrest Mother* with Will Honeycombe, who "feared the play was not busy enough for the present taste" and "recommended that every part should be perfectly new dressed." Will, it is perhaps unnecessary to remark, was not advocating "correct" costumes. I chance to possess a picture of "Mrs. Hartley in the character of Andromache." Mrs. Hartley wears hoops, paniers, and a sweeping train.

Her sleeves are trimmed with ermine, and her skirts are festooned with the aid of cords as heavy as the old-fashioned bell-pull. Add a tiara with tall plumes and you have a remarkable set of "weeds" for the widow of Hector.

Archæologists may smile, but really this fashion of dressing *Andromaque* accorded very happily with the stateliness of Racine. There is much to be said for reviving the "powder and patch" presentation of Racinian tragedy, much more than is to be said for the nondescript dresses worn by Mme. Bernhardt and her companions. M. de Max, as Oreste, looked as though he had strayed out of the Coronation Durbar. Hermione had obviously modelled herself on Becky Sharp as Clytemnestra, and the attendants of Pyrrhus had borrowed the clothes of Jos Sedley's hookabadar. Absurdity for absurdity, I prefer Mrs. Hartley's bell-pulls. After all, it matters very little, perhaps, what costumes are worn in *Andromaque* so long as they do not distract attention from the play itself, and playgoers who cannot attend to *Andromaque*, who are not absorbed and fascinated by it, who are not intoxicated with the beauty of it, can hardly count as human beings. For one thing, it is certain that they can never have been in love, never have been jealous, never have been jilted.

Everybody in the play is in love, and everybody is in love with the wrong person. Oreste loves Hermione, who will have none of him, but longs for Pyrrhus. Pyrrhus is betrothed to Hermione, but will have none of her and pursues Andromaque. Andromaque "never, never will desert" the memory of her dead Hector. The game is kept afoot by shilly-shallying. Pyrrhus, repulsed by Andromaque, thinks

he will take Hermione after all. Then he jilts Hermione and returns to Andromaque. Oreste exhorts Pyrrhus to relinquish his pursuit of Andromaque and his protection of her child, and is beside himself with wrath when taken at his word. What especially angers him is the thought that his own passion for Hermione has caused Pyrrhus to veer round to her. Hermione, enraged when Pyrrhus finally prefers Andromaque, offers her hand to Creste if only he will kill Pyrrhus. He does (or his Greeks do), and then it is Hermione's turn to be beside herself with grief because she has been taken at her word. As for Andromaque, after rejecting Pyrrhus again and again, she suddenly agrees to marry him. We know, of course, that she does this thinking to ensure the safety of her child, and purposing to kill herself immediately after the ceremony. But (as was remarked early in the eighteenth century) this is a very poor scheme, as it will leave the child to the mercy of a stepfather who has been "sold" by the child's mother. The obvious truth of the matter is that the fate of the child is a mere pretext for a plot. It is Andromaque's love for Hector, not her love for her child, which is her master passion. Philips should have called his play *The Distrest Widow* rather than *The Distrest Mother*. Another point in Andromaque's character has been the subject of much curious speculation. Does Racine intend to suggest that she "flirts" with Pyrrhus, or does he not? Years ago Nisard professed to find in or between the lines of her part evidence of a certain *coquetterie vertueuse*. It was a happy phrase, and many controversialists have played with it, but M. Emile Faguet has discovered that it was not invented by Nisard, but by Geoffroy, of the *Débats*, in 1803.

The late M. Sarcey was strong for the "flirting" theory; M. Faguet is dead against it. So, for that matter, is Mme. Bartet, the incomparable Andromaque of our time.

It has been suggested that Mme. Bernhardt ought to have played the part rather than Hermione, but I think she has chosen wisely. Andromaque is a part of pathos, while Hermione is a part of passion. Andromaque is a purely classical part, and Hermione is largely a romantic part; there is more colour in it, more "modernity" even. Andromaque is all of a piece, Hermione is everything by turns. Yes, Mme. Bernhardt has chosen wisely; Hermione gives her, as Andromaque could not, opportunity for her displays of "nerves," her hoarse cries, her seductive scenes, her whirlwinds of passion. But I do not understand her whim for playing so much of this part in a recumbent posture. Does she wish to rival Mme. Réjane in the first act of *Ma Cousine*? Whatever the reason, this Hermione is, more often than not, a horizontal Hermione. M. Desjardins is only a respectable Pyrrhus; he woos Andromaque without fire, and listens to the fierce invectives of Hermione without apparent attention. It is all very well for Pyrrhus to treat Hermione as a scold, but it will hardly do for him to treat her as a bore. The Oreste is M. de Max, who, as most people know, comes from Rumania, and would seem to suggest that the son of Agamemnon was a compatriot. One feels tempted to mutter over this youth who purports to be a Greek, but obviously is not, the old joke about "si jeune et déjà Moldo-Valache!" M. de Max is all for violent colour, febrile intensity, passion which vents itself in growls and groans. In short, his method strikes one as too

flamboyant for Racine. Racinian passion never for a moment forgets to express itself nobly. It may burn with a white heat, it never sputters. Indeed, *Andromaque* is a miracle of "elegance." It shows men and women hungering for one another like wild beasts, and yet draping their desires in a style of delicate reticence as fastidious as Jane Austen's.

## *ADRIENNE LECOUVREUR*

(CORONET, June 1905)

THE *Adrienne Lecouvreur* of Mme. Sarah Bernhardt has bewildered me on many points, but it has left me quite clear about one. It has compelled my admiration for the *Adrienne Lecouvreur* of MM. Scribe and Legouvé. I had hitherto attached little value to that ancient melodrama. I had thought it stilted, artificial, and long-winded. But then I had not become acquainted with the *Adrienne Lecouvreur* of Mme. Sarah Bernhardt. What caprice tempted the actress to rewrite the old subject is beyond conjecture. Is there not a proverb that it is well to let sleeping melodramas lie? Surely common gratitude might have induced Mme. Bernhardt to respect the mortal remains of MM. Scribe and Legouvé. Time after time she has triumphantly appeared as the heroine of their unimpeachably respectable work. But, apparently, her familiarity with it has bred contempt. She has got to feel that, in Mrs. Poyser's phrase, "it ought to be born again—and born different." Different, indeed, it now is! I do not say that the lady found it marble and left it brick; let me rather say that she found it stucco and left it *carton-pierre*. Where the deceased Academicians were long-winded, she is interminably prolix; where they were merely dull, she is appallingly tiresome; where they were slightly vague, she is absolutely

incomprehensible. They, too, had now and then a gleam of fun: Mme. Bernhardt is as solemn as a mausoleum. Why, one asks again, was she not satisfied with the old work? Perhaps I shall be told that her historical conscience revolted at it, that she had gone to the original documents, and was determined to present us with the unvarnished facts. Well, it may be so. Just as Mr. Wegg admitted that he had not read Gibbon slap through just lately, "being otherwise engaged, Mr. Boffin," so I confess that, for a like reason, I have not recently consulted the original documents about Adrienne Lecouvreur. Consequently, if Mme. Bernhardt chooses to assert that the famous actress's life was mixed up with the queer proceedings of the humpbacked Abbé whom M. de Max thrusts upon our attention, I am unable to offer any denial. But there credulity stops. I draw the line at Voltaire. Not all the documents in all the archives shall persuade me that every crisis in Adrienne's existence was witnessed and provided with appropriate reflections by Voltaire. Further, most of us have read some of Voltaire's writings, and I for one utterly decline to believe that his conversation can have sunk to the level indicated by Mme. Bernhardt. "Oh, ce Voltaire," says the schoolgirl in *Le Monde où l'on s'ennuie*, "quel génie!" If she had seen this play she would have said "quel raseur!"

You first see Voltaire in Adrienne's dressing-room at the theatre. Adrienne wafts him a kiss from behind the curtain, and Voltaire remarks that a woman's kisses are magical, even behind a curtain. When Maurice de Saxe enters Voltaire discreetly retires, but only to bide his time, for he knows full well that it is he and not Maurice who in the long run will get the

lion's share of the play. He took no prominent part in the next scene, a reception at the Duchess de Bouillon's, but no doubt he was lurking somewhere in the background—always with his ironic smile—biding his time. In the foreground was the humpbacked Abbé, already mentioned, painting Adrienne's portrait and indulging in melancholy reflections on his hump. The *grandes dames* fondled his hump for luck, and his vexation became more marked than ever. Meanwhile, there had been a furious quarrel over Maurice between Adrienne and the Duchess de Bouillon, and the Duchess, vowing vengeance, hissed into the ear of the humpbacked Abbé that he must become her tool. In the next scene you were in the Luxembourg gardens, whither the Abbé came to inform Adrienne that the Duchess had commissioned him to poison her. "Poison her within a week or—the Bastille!" The week being now up, the police appeared to carry off the Abbé. Where was Voltaire? I began to wonder—till, sure enough, one found him, still ironically smiling, in the Abbé's cell at the Bastille, comforting the Abbé, exchanging polite repartees with Adrienne, and calmly telling the Duke de Bouillon all about his wife's infidelities. Voltaire then restored the Abbé to liberty. Was he not the champion of Calas? But he was too late to save Adrienne. The implacable Duchess told the poor woman that she was poisoned, and had only a day or two to live. In the final act you saw her die. So, of course, did Voltaire. He retired respectfully into a corner, in order that she might have room to die, and she said to him, almost with her dying breath, "Your smile has lost its irony." Maurice de Saxe and the humpbacked Abbé also arrived in the nick of time to see her die. Very likely

her death is "documentary." It is certainly very touching. She whirls round and round, as in a dance, until she stops short when confronted by the hump-backed Abbé. Then she sinks slowly into Maurice's arms, and expires. Voltaire strikes a Voltairean attitude in his corner. "Oh, ce Voltaire! Quel poseur!"

If I have insisted upon the Voltairean element in this play, it is because I suspect that therein is to be found the true explanation of its origin. Mme. Bernhardt felt, I conjecture, that MM. Scribe and Legouvé had no business to write a play about Voltaire's period and to leave Voltaire out of it. And so she has repaired the omission—given Voltaire his ironic smile and then killed Adrienne in his presence in order to purge the smile of its irony. But she cannot purge my smile in that way. It may be wrong to indulge in an ironic smile over a work which has evidently cost the actress great pains and much—far too much—ink; but I really cannot help it. I fully recognise the fine acting of Mme. Bernhardt herself in the eponymous part. But all the fine acting in the world cannot blind one to the fact that the Duchess de Bouillon is a mere mechanical *traitresse* of melodrama, that Adrienne in the new play is not the poetic, suavely beautiful figure of the old, that the hump-backed Abbé is a grotesque nuisance, and that Voltaire, for all the wit he shows, might be—Fréron. When he let the irony die out of his smile—with Mme. Bernhardt's play still under his nose—he gave the final twist to one's conviction that he was an arrant impostor.

## RÉJANE

### *LA PARISIENNE*

(CORONET, June 1901)

TO say that *La Parisienne* is a clever piece would be true but inadequate. It is diabolically clever. It purports to have been written by the late M. Henry Becque, single-handed, but I suspect Old Nick to have been at his elbow, an unseen collaborator. At least, there must have been brimstone in M. Becque's inkpot. No one with the slightest sense of humour can see the piece without laughing, or rather, I fear it must be admitted, without sniggering. But that is only the superficial effect. The play cuts deep. Its irony bites like vitriol. And the ultimate impression is of something grim, cruel, malignant. It tends to make us loathe ourselves, or, at any rate, our next-door neighbours. This is a strange impression to receive from a comedy, from Mme. Réjane's face of impish mischief, her ravishing gowns. It is a strange blend, this whiff of sulphur combined with *odeur de femme*. But, then, *La Parisienne* is a strange piece.

It begins with one of the most complete hoaxes ever devised by a playwright. The curtain rises upon an empty stage. Madame enters and hastily conceals a letter under a blotting-pad. Close upon her heels follows Monsieur in a jealous fury. "Give me that

letter!" "No!" And then a long scene of bullying and bickering. The man, tortured with suspicion, plies the woman with questions. "Where have you been?" "Do you still love me?" Madame at first enjoys the man's agony, and is then exasperated by it. It is the familiar scene of jealous husband and teasing wife. They calm down, and Monsieur begs Madame to be more prudent in her conduct. "En me restant fidèle, vous restez digne et honorable." As he utters the words the door opens and another gentleman enters. "Prenez garde," whispers Madame to Monsieur—"voilà mon mari." And, lo! we find that our quarrelling couple, so conjugal in every detail of their quarrel, are not husband and wife, after all, but lover and mistress. How, then, comes it that the jealous gentleman is so like a husband? That is the point, or a point, of the play. Lafont, the lover, has assumed by usage and temperament and the inevitable tendency of things, *quasi*-marital qualities. "Un second mari, autant dire," is Clotilde's way of putting it. And so she finds herself between Lafont, the husband *de facto*, and Du Mesnil, the husband *de jure*. If anyone is shocked by the situation it is certainly not Clotilde. She does not see the irony of it, for she cannot see herself as she is. No more does Lafont, for the same reason. No more does Du Mesnil, for Du Mesnil sees nothing at all, not even when it passes under his very nose.

But the irony is there, and its teeth drive sharp into our poor human flesh. It consists in the spectacle of two people carrying on irregular relations with precisely the same set of feelings and prejudices which would be operative were their relations regular. The "immoral" is shown to labour under the same condi-

tions as the "moral." Lafont is exigent, querulous, jealous, and tiresome. He is even prudish. He forbids Clotilde to visit in a household of somewhat doubtful reputation. He is shocked to hear that one of her married friends is a faithless wife. In sum—"un second mari, autant dire."

And Clotilde, with all her irregularity of conduct, is entirely conventional in her ideas. She declares herself a Conservative in politics, because she inclines to the party of social "order." She is indignant at the thought that her lover might leave her for another mistress who is "without religious principles." As a matter of fact, she has no moral sense whatever. She is absolutely without conscience. Things are for her merely pleasant or unpleasant, conduct is merely expedient or inexpedient. She is a Nietzschean, a Nietzschean without knowing it, a Nietzschean in frills and furbelows of the most fashionable cut. She has lovers, but no passions, hardly even appetites, only caprices. A monster, then, something merely perverse and noxious? Yes—and No. Yes, according to any accepted standard of ethics. No, by virtue of her reality. There is a great deal of ordinary human nature in Clotilde. She desires to hurt no one, she merely means to "have a good time." She is good-humoured, patient, reasonable, tactful. Mark that she is a capable woman—indeed, the one capable member of the triangular household. She gets her fool of a husband into a good post. It would be ungenerous to inquire too closely into the means; the point is that she can do for her husband what he cannot do for himself. If Lafont were not so tiresomely jealous, she could get on excellently with him, too. This, after all, is an eminently companionable sort of monster. And,

though she has a wonderful gift of fiction, she does not tell unnecessary lies. According to M. Anatole France, that, in a woman, may be called veracity.

Nor is she without her little chastening experience. When she has dismissed Lafont she tries another lover, who bores her to death and then leaves her in the lurch. The lesson is not thrown away. There was something in the "second mari" after all. She takes him back into favour, and we leave the three people of the first scene all comfortably together again in the last. Do you not hear a chuckle as the curtain descends? It must be M. Becque's unseen collaborator. Evidently on this occasion there is no need, with the charitable lady in the Scotch anecdote, to "pity the puir deil." He has had it all his own way. And he could not conceivably have found a more bewitching, tantalising, irresistible interpreter than Mme. Réjane. Her performance of Clotilde is one of the most comic—and one of the most disquieting—things to be seen on the stage of our time.

## ZAZA

(IMPERIAL, May 1902)

IN Paris they have an expression that may be said to speak volumes, very trashy volumes—the *littérature de concierge*. It is not difficult to conjecture the sort of literature beloved by the autocrat of the street-door. It must be sentimental at all costs, even at the cost of dwelling upon illicit passion, provided that the superior respectability of family life be vindicated in the end. It must have the glitter of the gay world; indeed, the *concierge* will not object should it verge on the garish. As many people as possible in it must be splendidly dressed. The facile contrast of tortured hearts beating under heavily bejewelled bodices must be rigorously insisted on. No direct and original observation of life is needed; indeed, it would be resented by the *concierge*, who prefers the conventional emotions and situations which are passed on as “common form” from one hack-writer to another. In an American version of *Zaza* by Mr. Belasco the word *concierge* has, I note, been translated, presumably in accordance with American idiom, as janitor. I thank Mr. Belasco for that word. It provides a convenient and comprehensive label for this play. *Zaza* is pre-eminently janitorious. The doorkeepers of all nations—if I may use the word in a Pickwickian and metaphorical sense—will revel in it. It shows

how spangles and a career of music-hall songs are not incompatible with true love. It presents violent contrasts of households in Bohemia and "correct" homes in the most expensively respectable quarters of Paris. It gives several of its personages the opportunity of being absurdly overdressed. It toys with vice and yet pays complete, if tardy, homage to virtue. In short, it is a perfect specimen of the janitorious drama.

The play, which is in five acts (for what *concierge* does not know the orthodox number of acts required for a theatrical masterpiece?), opens behind the scenes of a concert hall in a French country town. Zaza is the "star" and, of course, has a jealous rival. They are both petulant and vixenish and, at one moment, come to blows. Zaza dresses and "makes up" for her part in view of the audience. The company come and go. Privileged gentlemen in the glossiest evening dress present bouquets. Ah! that life behind the scenes! How the doorkeeping mind revels in its gay wickedness! But Zaza, it need hardly be said, is no common "star." She has a heart—and she has lost it to one of the gentlemen in glossy evening dress, M. Bernard Dufresne, who promptly falls a victim to her wiles. In the next act—each act turning a different facet of the heroine to the limelight—shows Zaza playing at simple domestic bliss with M. Dufresne in a country cottage. The *concierge* remembers the parallel case of Marguérite Gauthier and Armand Duval, and is happy. But Zaza's bliss is shortlived. She learns from one of her theatrical comrades that M. Dufresne has a wife in Paris. The pair have been seen at the play together, drinking chocolate. "I'll spoil their chocolate," cries the infuriated Zaza, and starts for Paris. Now comes the opportunity for that family sentiment which the

doorkeeper feels to be his due. Intent on making a disturbance in the Dufresne household, Zaza is confronted by a little girl, and in the presence of childish innocence she retires humbled and in silence. Then passion has its turn. Zaza turns upon her lover and rends him, works herself into a frenzy of hysteria, and smashes the china on the mantelshelf. A woman shouting at the top of her voice and beside herself with fury is just the sort of woman the *concierge* can understand. "Women, poor things, are like that," he reflects, being in his way a philosopher and ready to take broad views of human nature. Besides, he is well aware that in all these plays a *scène de rupture* is the proper thing. Next to noise—of which in the penultimate act the *concierge* it will have been seen gets his fill—he loves worldly success, gaudy success, symbolised by extravagant costumes, the homage of the multitude, and a smart victoria. Zaza duly provides him with all this. In order to forget her lover she has devoted herself to her profession, and is now an artist of world-wide reputation and boundless wealth. When M. Dufresne comes to seek a reconciliation she parts from him more in sorrow than in anger, bidding him go back to his child, while with dignified simplicity she orders her coachman to drive her "home." A play which ends on the word "home" is bound to captivate the guardian of every street-door in both hemispheres.

Some people, not engaged in doorkeeping, may wonder why such plays as *Zaza* are written. The answer in this case is very simple. *Zaza* was constructed by MM. Berton and Simon to encircle the talent of Mme. Réjane. It is quite certain that, if Mme. Réjane had not been Mme. Réjane, there would have been no *Zaza*. That would not have been a

serious calamity. But we must take the world as we find it, and Mme. Réjane as Mme. Réjane. She must be allowed to have her fling. Where is there another actress who can be so *canaille* and frisky and sentimentally grotesque and grotesquely sentimental? Where is there another actress who can speak so comically through her nose or blow that impudent little organ so realistically after a fit of tears? Where is there another actress who can so cleverly reproduce the gradual *crescendo* from nervous irritation to suffocating or shrieking hysteria? The answer is that there is no other such actress, and that therefore Mme. Réjane must do all these things and be all these things for us in her own inimitable way, and have her fling which is like nobody else's fling. That is the explanation, though not the excuse, of such a play as *Zaza*. Surely such a combination of opposites as this play exhibits—external reality and internal falsity—never was seen before. False, its implied suggestion that the courtesan is “redeemed” by a sincere passion. False, the glamour it throws over the vulgar music-hall “star,” who, purged by grief, ends as a person of lofty sentiments and elegant language. False, the sentimental excuses of Zaza for her—let us say Bohemian—life, on the score of parental neglect. False, the conversion of Zaza from a virago bent on revenge to a humbled penitent, all on account of a talk with a pert little child. False, the character of Zaza’s lover—or, rather, not false, but null, as this personage is a mere automaton, a mere whetstone for Zaza to grind her various axes upon. False, intolerably false, the whole atmosphere of the play, its representation of love—and such love!—as sanctifying everything, accounting for everything, indeed, constituting everything. Looked at from the

point of view of the mind and the feelings, the heart and the brain, *Zaza* is a miracle of falsity.

And yet, externally, how real! Watch the music-hall "artist" at her toilet—how she rubs in the grease-paint, unpins her false hair, dabs the powder-puff over her shoulders, putting on a pinafore the while in order not to soil her skirt. Not a detail is missed. Even when the corset is unlaced, *Zaza* is careful to go through the pantomime of holding her breath. All the world and his wife have been shown exactly how the "artist" dresses and undresses; we feel that the sum of human knowledge has been appreciably augmented. But on the principle that you cannot have too much of a good thing, *Zaza* does it all, or nearly all, over again. Having combed her hair in Act I., she combs it once more in Act IV., and offers you a further piece of minute realism by removing the loose ends of hair from the comb and throwing them out of the window. Then she dusts the chair with her uplifted petticoats, cleans the wine-glasses by blowing into them and giving them a wipe with her dressing-gown, and performs other choice little Bohemian-domestic exploits to which only the pen of a Swift could do full justice. Or watch *Zaza* discovering a hole in the tablecloth, making faces at the *bonne* about it, and trying to hide it with a plate. What a "convincing" spectacle, what a marvellous application of another player's famous theory about holding the mirror up to nature! When you have done with these mechanical details, these "fireside concerns" as Elia would have called them, you may turn to examine *Zaza* in an attack of nerves. See her mouth twitching, her hands clenched, listen to the shrill note gradually coming into her voice. Then sit tight in your seat for the final explosion, the total physical

abandonment and degradation. It is the very thing. Coleridge had a mock apostrophe to

“Inoculation ! Heavenly maid !”

So Mme. Réjane—for Mme. Réjane and *Zaza* are one—so Mme. Réjane is the muse of hystero-epilepsy.

And when you have wallowed in the crapulous, and been dragged through the sordid, and shocked with the frantic, and fooled by the sham-sentimental for five acts, at the end of it all the question occurs—Is even Mme. Réjane “worth it”? She does it all to the life—seems, in fact, to *live* the character. But *Zaza* is rather a heavy price to pay even for this incomparable talent.

What really saves Mme. Réjane and the play is her unfailing sense of humour. Her winks of intelligence, her droll intonations, her irrepressible playfulness do relieve the character of some of its grossness. You come back to the old position. Because Réjane is Réjane, the disagreeable play has been written; and if, on occasion, you cannot help being pleased in spite of yourself, that also is because Réjane is Réjane.

## *LA ROBE ROUGE*

(IMPERIAL, June 1902)

M. EUGÈNE BRIEUX has been called a second Augier, because of his aim to make the drama an instrument of moral and social action. The dramatist, he maintains, should be the bagman of the intellectual world. Perhaps that is why you discern a touch of Herbert Spencer in *La Robe Rouge*. The English philosopher has shown the impediments to clear thinking in what he calls the "professional bias." The French playwright shows you that bias in its tragic consequences, in the wrecking of homes and the shedding of blood. But it is the picture of the bias itself rather than that of its results which is the really valuable part of *La Robe Rouge*, because a study of manners and motives is more important than the exhibition of violent acts. The professional bias selected for exposure is that of the French magistracy. M. Brieux deals seriously with the men of the law, the official lawyers, those who sit on the Bench and those who prosecute for the State, as Molière dealt humorously with the men of physic. It is desirable to be precise. You are not shown that "the law is a hass"; you are not shown that those who administer it are conscious and deliberate rogues. What you are shown is the working of the law to unjust ends through inevitable professional instincts, rivalries, practice, and traditions.

Things that are life and death, or honour and dishonour, for the accused are for the lawyers merely details of "*le métier*." The people in the dock, innocent or guilty, are for the lawyers merely pawns in the game of professional advancement. And for the moment let me also treat the accused persons of the particular story as pawns and consider solely the dramatist's picture of "*le métier*." A remote provincial criminal Court of the third class desires to be raised to the second class. Its promotion will depend on its output —the number of cases and the percentage of convictions. Every acquittal is a misfortune for it, every prospect of a capital sentence a piece of good luck. Hence the interest of every official lawyer in finding accused persons guilty. Mark the psychological consequence; the wish is father to the thought, and every official lawyer tends in advance to believe every accused person guilty. Mouzon, the *juge d'instruction*, or examining magistrate, typifies this frame of mind. A murder has been committed; he believes he has laid his hand on the assassin. Note the next psychological stage. Self-interest originated his desire to prove the man guilty, and that desire creates his belief in the man's guilt; but his belief is strengthened and becomes a fixed idea by the tendency which we all have to make good a theory when we have once pledged ourselves to it. This mental process is worked out, step by step, in the second act of *La Robe Rouge*. Unconsciously—remember that it is unconsciously, through professional bias—the magistrate twists every answer given by A., the accused person, into evidence of guilt. Possessed by his preconceived theory, he finds it monstrous that A. should profess innocence. He bullies, lays traps, even begs for a confession—a process which merely

drives A. out of his senses. Then A.'s wife is brought in and subjected to the same torture, and, bewildered in her turn by the magistrate, she herself half believes in her husband's guilt. The examination is, however, abortive, and A. is sent for trial.

Another side of the case. Mouzon has got into trouble with a disreputable woman, and is requested by his superior officer, the Procureur-Général, to resign his post. The local deputy, who knows the Minister of Justice, intervenes in his favour. Scandal must be avoided, especially with a shaky Ministry. So let Mouzon be sent away by all means—but to a higher post. Mouzon's misbehaviour, then, is the direct cause of his promotion.

Act III. exhibits a fresh aspect of the professional bias. The Procureur, Vagret, who has to prosecute A., is a simple, honest man, without "push" and without influence. His promotion depends on his getting a verdict, and the thought nerves him to a great effort. The jury, it is clear, have been convinced by his eloquence, and he is congratulated by everyone on a foregone conclusion. All of a sudden Vagret asks for a brief suspension of the trial, and makes a confession to his wife. He had honestly believed in A.'s guilt—for he too had his preconceived theory—but at the moment of his loudest thunders doubts began to occur to him. There were two men in him, one accumulating argument on argument against the accused, the other silently criticising these arguments and finding them faulty. He has now swung round to belief in A.'s innocence, and, at the sacrifice of his promotion, he feels he must move for an acquittal. He will "do his duty as an honest man." Here you have the lawyer whose conscience conquers his professional bias—in other words, the unsuccessful magistrate.

Is the theme of professional bias exhausted? Not yet. There is the President of Assize, who also depends for his advancement upon a conviction. Has not a Paris journalist come all the way to the Pyrenees to report the case? Quick, *greffier*, get him a good seat! And there is the Procureur-Général, who holds that it is the duty of procureurs to prosecute, and to leave questions of innocence to the counsel for the defence. Anyhow, he refuses to discuss Vagret's qualms of conscience, lest he might compromise his own interests. What would the local Deputy say? And what the Deputy's friend, the Minister of Justice? The only magistrate who can afford to look at the facts impartially is the one who has no professional interest in them, because he has reached the age-limit and is about to take his pension.

So much for the professional bias. You have seen it on every side and in every shade. M. Brieux omits nothing and makes every word, every action, tell towards his end. The scene of the examination by the Juge d'Instruction is a masterpiece at once of dramatic completeness and of dramatic economy. The scene of the procureur's "case of conscience" is a masterpiece of dramatic sincerity. Beyond all cavil, M. Brieux is a born dramatist "of ideas." He has set out to examine and to exhibit a professional bias, not as an abstraction, but as a basis for the natural actions of living people. And what he set out to do he has thoroughly done.

But he is also a dramatist in the lower, and more popular, sense. He can invent and develop an interesting story. For even were the "ideas" of the play eliminated, even were all the gentlemen of the long robe mere dummies instead of links in a logical chain, the story of the man whom I have called A. would be an

exciting piece of drama. To use the Aristotelian lingo, the *muthos* of *La Robe Rouge* is as good as its *ethos* and its *dianoia*. A. is wholly innocent, yet the lawyer's questions are so adroit that the audience is almost tempted, like A.'s wife, to believe in his guilt. While he is in prison awaiting trial his neighbours rob him, his men leave his fields, and he is a ruined man. But that is not the worst. Some past irregularity of his wife's, long dead and buried, and redeemed by many years of irreproachable conduct, is incidentally brought to light at the trial. For the lawyers it was a mere "point," a minor move in the judicial game. But it wrecks A.'s happiness for ever. He casts off his wife and takes her children from her. Despair prompts the woman to frenzy; she seizes a knife and plunges it into the breast of the man who is responsible for her misery, the Juge d'Instruction Mouzon. A concession to the old-fashioned "poetic justice"? Perhaps; but not forced. A picture so uniformly sombre needed the relieving splash of blood-red, the sudden catastrophe of tragedy.

Mme. Réjane is the wife, hot-headed, an "instinctive" creature, in the end a wild beast; and in that sort of part this versatile actress can do just as well as in the coquetry of *Ma Cousine* or in the *canaillerie* of *Zaza*.

## THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE

(COURT, November 1905)

YES, decidedly the Court is our "Shavian" theatre. Mr. Shaw's own plays are shown there nightly, and in the afternoons they give you new plays by the younger men, all different in essentials, but all alike in the one particular that there clings to them a faint aroma of Mr. Shaw. It is in the air of the Court Theatre, just as a vague odour of patchouli is in the air of the Burlington Arcade or as the ballroom in *La Cagnotte*, when entered by the gentleman who had had his swallow-tail coat cleaned, smelt of benzine. Mr. St. John Hankin's *Return of the Prodigal* had been delicately scented with a Shaw *sachet*, and now *The Voysey Inheritance* of Mr. Granville Barker gratifies your nostrils with *triple extrait de Shaw*. You recognise the subtle perfume whenever the personages fall to giving solemnly nonsensical or nonsensically solemn explanations of life, morality, and one another. Mr. Barker has a story to tell, an interesting story in itself, and so long as he lets the facts speak for themselves all is plain sailing. But at periodical intervals, overcome by the atmosphere of the Court Theatre, he feels compelled to offer you a gloss, a "Shavian" gloss, on the facts. Then all is confusion, "new" morality, Nietzschean "transvaluation," and goodness knows what. It is legitimate enough for Mr. Shaw himself

to indulge in this game. He invented it. His dramatic works are so many pretexts for playing it. It would never do for *him* to let his facts speak for themselves, because observation of external facts is not his strong point. He never allows himself the chance of looking fairly and squarely at the facts, because of his haste to be evolving a theory from them. In so far as he sees them at all, he sees them only in the light of his pre-conceived explanation. It is quite otherwise with Mr. Barker, who shows in this play a real gift of keen, minute, relentless observation. If only he had been content with that! If only he had let us enjoy in peace, and without comment, the curious little spectacle of life, or a certain corner of it, which he has had the skill to put before us! But no; he must get to work with the "Shavian" scent-spray. "Conventional" morality must be made to stand on its head, and things that need no explanation must be explained all wrong. I venture to commend to him an example from China. When two mandarins are engaged in conversation they pause at intervals to exchange little scraps of paper, inscribed with jokes. Thus they fulfil the recognised duty of mingling grave thoughts with refined pleasantry. In a similar fashion the Court dramatists might serve up that admixture of Shaw which the etiquette of the place demands. The story might go on in a plain way, and at fixed intervals the personages might retire in pairs to the background and converse for a few moments *sotto voce*. We should not be bothered by hearing their remarks; but it would be an understood thing that these were the "Shavian" explanations. Another recommendation, and I have done with advice. Mr. Barker should remember the French proverb: *Qui trop embrasse mal étreint.* He

sets out to tell not one story but several—the story of old Voysey's rascality, of Edward Voysey's trials, of Hugh Voysey's matrimonial experiences. He sketches for us a round dozen of Voyseys or people allied to the Voysey family by marriage. This is a scheme of almost Balzacian dimensions, a little *Comédie Humaine*. Even with the liberal allowance of five acts and three hours it is hardly possible to handle so much matter without crowding, diffuseness, lack of perspective. At times you can hardly see the wood for the trees.

All this notwithstanding, *The Voysey Inheritance* has great merits. It has fresh and true observation, subtle discrimination of character, sub-acid humour, an agreeable irony, and a general air of *reality*. That is the important thing. We have got miles away from the theatrical. We do genuinely feel that the roof has been lifted off an office in Lincoln's Inn or a suburban mansion and that the people disclosed to view behave and talk ("Shavian" explanations always excepted) in a perfectly natural way. One supremely realistic effect Mr. Barker has adopted from a far greater master than Mr. Shaw. I refer to his gradual unfolding of the principal character by leaving parts of it at first enigmatic and then clearing them up by the method of retrospection. You have to piece this and that bit of evidence together till at last you have something like a complete picture of the man and his motives. This, of course—hats off, please!—is the famous "Ibsen touch." When you first hear Mr. Voysey's confession and *apologia*—which he makes to his son almost as soon as the curtain is up—you do not quite know how much of it to believe. Ostensibly a prosperous solicitor, of the highest respectability, a liberal father of a family, a generous parishioner, altogether one of the brightest

ornaments of our great middle-class, Voysey is in truth a thief. He has been living all these years on his clients' money, using their trust funds while regularly paying them their interest. But how, asks his horrified son (and newly-made partner) did he come to embark on his frauds? He answers that his own father began it and, like a dutiful son, he took up the burden of the inheritance. Beginning, then, as a martyr, he now considers himself something very like a hero. He has played a difficult and dangerous game successfully. It is he, the confessed swindler, who exults, while it is his as yet clean-handed son who is abashed—the son who has fed himself on books of ethics ("the kind of garden oats," says the father contemptuously, "you young men sow nowadays"). Voysey is the Borkman of Lincoln's Inn. But why does the father confess to his son? He says it is because he feels his time is getting short and he hopes his son will take up the Voysey inheritance from him as he took it up from his own father. But is this true? Someone suggests, later, another reason, a generalisation of criminal psychology. Men who succeed at the dangerous game played by Voysey, senior, feel an overmastering impulse to disclose their secret—an instance of perverted pride. A further doubt; did the grandfather really begin the swindling? Ultimately the most probable conclusion seems to be that he did, but to an extent so slight that the son in a few years was able to replace the stolen funds, and *after that*, seeing how easy the thing was and eager for wealth, began stealing on his own account and on a large scale.

And now what will the son do? Wash his hands of the dirty business? Or take up the Voysey inheritance? If he takes it up, it shall only be in order to

devote his life to restitution. Hardly has he made up his mind to the latter course when the father gets a chill and dies. The son, Edward, tells the truth to the assembled family as soon as they have come home from the funeral. Here come in some capital scenes depicting the several members of the Voysey family—Booth Voysey, the military fool, who cannot understand, but bullies everybody in a loud voice; Trenchard Voysey, a cautious K.C.; Hugh Voysey, exponent of the unpractical “artist temperament”; Honor Voysey, the old maid of the family; and the several wives or sweethearts of the sons. They are all shocked by the disclosure (save poor deaf Mrs. Voysey, who knew something of the truth already, and now, with the insensibility of age, is unmoved); but none of them will help Edward. He at first resolves to publish the truth and take the consequences—among them, prison. His sweetheart dissuades him, not without “Shavian” reflections. Then he will carry on the old game—gradually setting aside the profits of the business to replacing the smaller sums. Thus the poorer clients will at any rate be recouped; the rich ones must wait. But suppose if, in carrying on the game, he should become demoralised, like his father, and steal, not from the rich for the poor, but for himself? His sweetheart says she will take that risk. But very soon the game is up. One of the bigger clients comes to withdraw his funds, and has to be told the truth. “And now prosecute, do prosecute,” says Edward, “prison would be a rest from this harassing toil.” The client wavers, finally decides not to prosecute, but tells other clients. What will be the end? We never know. Prison perhaps? Then Edward’s sweetheart will be more proud of him than ever. Anything rather than a life

of slavery, in the hopeless attempt to make restitution. The debate, nebulous with "Shawisms," is cut short by the final curtain. I have an idea that the pair were discussing a case of conscience from the point of view of an entirely revised system of ethics (perhaps Nietzschean—on the principle of *omne ignotum pro Nietzscheano*); but I am not sure.

## *THE WAY OF THE WORLD*

(MERMAID SOCIETY, *April 1904*)

PLEASURE-SEEKERS ought to be grateful to the Mermaid Society for reviving *The Way of the World*. I say pleasure-seekers advisedly. For it is the primary business of dramatic entertainments, old or new, to entertain. A classic is a classic not because it is old, not (as Stendhal petulantly said) because it pleased our grandfathers, but because it pleases us. When it ceases to please it is only a *ci-devant* classic. It may still have its proper place on the museum shelf, but the theatre has no use for it. The Mermaid Society has demonstrated *The Way of the World* to be still a live classic. Lady Wishfort and Mrs. Millamant and Sir Wilfull Witwoud are brimming over with life. Congreve is still capable of giving you a vivid sense of reality. You may have suspected that as likely; but it is only through the Mermaid Society that you know it for certain. And how have they enabled you to know it? Through the quite straightforward and familiar, yet magical and inscrutable, influence of flesh and blood.

It is, I suggest, just because this influence is so familiar that its importance in the theatre is commonly underestimated. What are the elements of an acted drama? Apart from the costumes and scenery, there is the contribution of the dramatist and the contribution

of the players. The dramatist "invents" the story and characters and dialogue. The players contribute their skill; the propriety with which they speak the words set down for them and the art with which they assume their imaginary character. But they also contribute something infinitely more important—something which marks off an acted drama from every other work of art, and something with which art has nothing to do—flesh and blood, their bodies, gestures, glance and voices. It is, probably, because this element has nothing to do with art that we hear so little about it from the artists. They hardly like to admit, or even to think, that they owe so much of their effect to the brute forces of nature, to the simple fact that they are, as Lady Wishfort would say, "persons." Yet there is nothing more certain. The fascination of what is vaguely called "temperament"—which, whatever else it may mean, means something physical and innate—is supreme in the theatre. A player who has it may warp and maim his part to suit it and yet give the spectator greater pleasure than the merely skilful "mime" who has it not. Eleonora Duse is a case in point. So, it is evident, was Edmund Kean. The curious psychical influence of bodily presence, the invisible currents that pass between one human being and another, are now the subject of a scientific research still only in its first beginnings. When more is known about them, then more will be known about the peculiar energies of the acted drama. But, though the causes are as yet obscure, the effects are plain enough. There is all the difference in the world between certain lines of printed dialogue headed "Millamant," supplemented by the reader's imagination, and the same words spoken by a real woman, with a certain smile, a certain

toss of the head, a certain gait. It is a difference not of degree but of kind. What Congreve has done for an imaginary woman called Millamant suddenly springs into life through everything that nature has done for a real woman called Ethel Irving. Of course this flesh-and-blood element, so enormous an aid to the dramatist, may also turn and rend him. Many a speech or action will pass muster in print but stand forth as false or inadequate when actually uttered or performed before us. The character must hold together before, so to speak, the human body is put into it. Congreve's characters stand this test. Therefore *The Way of the World* is still a "live" classic.

Pursue this analysis a little further and you find the flesh-and-blood element contributing to the total effect in two rather different ways. An old play will present permanent features of human nature—scenes of love and jealousy and hate, or, it may be, a coquette's airs, or, perhaps, an old matron's vain affectations—and temporary transitory features, manners, or language now obsolete. A reader would mentally distinguish between them as the "actual" and the "historical" features. What happens, precisely, when they are presented on the stage by means of flesh and blood? The "actual" features merely become more actual. Their effect of reality is deepened. Such a scene, for instance, as that between Fainall and Mrs. Marwood in the Mall, when the guilty lovers fall out, taste something of the bitterness of a clandestine *amour* with its eternal hovering on the edge of hate, and then kiss again with tears, gains enormously in reality, though it was real enough in the printed page. It was real enough, but now it becomes "modern"; its close resemblance to sides of life that we know or divine positively startles

us. To see a beautiful, highly-strung woman, in the person of Miss Edyth Olive, before our eyes in this plight is a much more poignant thing than to read about the same situation in the book as concerning an imaginary Mrs. Fainall. Still, the difference of impression is only one of degree. So with Millamant's scenes and Lady Wishfort's scenes. These women are eternally true; Miss Ethel Irving and Mrs. Theodore Wright only come in to reinforce the author. Now turn to the "historical" features—as, for example, Sir Wilfull's tipsy scene or the dialogue between Witwoud and Petulant—and you find the flesh-and-blood element not deepening the impression, but transforming it. What was "historical" now becomes "actual." The things said and done are strange, but the fact that they are said and done by real people makes them credible. While you laughed at Sir Wilfull in the printed page, you scarcely believed in him; it is impossible not to believe in Mr. Lennox Pawle. *Could* there have been such a creature as Witwoud? the reader asks himself. Yes, answers the spectator, for there the fellow really *is*, with the voice and strut and grin of Mr. Nigel Playfair. About Petulant, perhaps, you may still have a lingering doubt; he is an untractable character, and Mr. Ian Maclaren hardly succeeds in dragging him out of the "historical" limbo. But of one thing this revival must quite convince you. It has knocked the bottom out of Lamb's plea for Congreve's immoral world as something conventional and fantastic. So soon as the characters are put solidly before you by living men and women you are absolutely appalled by their grim reality. To say that you are appalled is only another way of saying that you are pleased; you snatch a fearful joy.

I have dwelt on the impression of reality given by the revival of this play and the causes of it because one gets tired of the nonsense talked about Congreve as now fit only for the "closet." One need not examine the reasons why his *Way of the World* is so weak in plot. It is customary to say that Congreve could not invent a plot; it would be much more accurate to say that, given the existing conditions of the "platform" stage at the time, there was no particular need for him to try. The Congrevean stage was not a stage of plots, but a stage of "turns." This is the very feature which sends Londoners of to-day flocking to "musical comedy"; why, then, complain of it in Congreve? By the way, it was an actress hitherto associated with "musical comedy" who played Millamant. Miss Ethel Irving affords another illustration of what I have said about the supremacy of "temperament." She may not quite harmonise with your preconceived notions of Congreve's *grande coquette*, who is majestic, almost awe-inspiring. Miss Irving is rather the "dainty rogue," but so dainty a rogue, so "magnetic," so real a piece of womanhood, such a delight to ear and eye, that it would be affectation to profess any disappointment over her failure in exact coincidence with the ideal character.

## THE IRISH NATIONAL THEATRE

(*May, 1903*)

STENDHAL said that the greatest pleasure he had ever got from the theatre was given him by the performance of some poor Italian strollers in a barn. A little band of Irish men and women, strangers to London and to Londoners, playing in a suburban hall succeeded in giving some constant frequenters of the regular playhouses an hour or two of calm delight quite outside the range of anything which those houses have to offer. The Irish National Theatre Society is understood to consist of amateurs, all engaged in daily work, who can devote only their leisure time to the stage. That was the case, it will be remembered, with the enthusiasts who helped Antoine to found his *Théâtre Libre*; but there is this difference, that, while the French enterprise was an artistic adventure and nothing else, the Irish Theatre is that and something more. It is part of a national movement, it is designed to express the spirit of the race, the "virtue" of it, in the medium of acted drama. That is obviously an excellent design. If the peculiarities of Irish thought and feeling can be brought home to us through drama we shall all be the better for the knowledge; and the art of drama, too, cannot but gain by a change of air, a new outlook, a fresh current of ideas. Meanwhile, it will suffice to record the keen pleasure which an afternoon with the

Irish National Theatre has afforded, and try to analyse that pleasure.

First and foremost, there is the pleasure of the ear. This, of course, is an accidental pleasure; it has nothing to do with the æsthetic aims of the Society, nothing to do with the dramatic theories or poetic gifts of its President, Mr. W. B. Yeats, nothing to do with art at all; it results from the nature of things, from the simple fact that Irish speakers are addressing English listeners. It is none the less a very exquisite pleasure. I, for one, had never realised the musical possibilities of our language until I heard these Irish people speak it. Most Englishmen, I fancy, get their notions of Irish pronunciation from Thackeray, and though, no doubt, Thackeray's version was always good-natured enough, yet the talk of Costigan and the Mulligan and the O'Dowd tends to burlesque the truth. The association is always one of drollery, whereas the English of these Irish players gives you an impression, not of drollery at all, but of elegance. "Fool" is pronounced "fule" (with the thin French "u"), "philosophy" is "philosophee," "argument" is "argu-mént," and the words look funny when so written; but they do not sound funny, they sound charming. The unexpected emphasis on the minor syllables has an air of not ungraceful pedantry or, better still, of an old-world courtliness. You are listening to English spoken with watchful care and slightly timorous hesitation, as though it were a learned language. That at once ennobles our mother-tongue, brings it into relief, gives it a daintiness and distinction of which, in the rough workaday use of it, one had never dreamed. But the charm does not stop there. These Irish people *sing* our language—and always in

a minor key. It becomes in very fact "most musical, most melancholy." Rarely, very rarely, the chant degenerates into a whine. But, for the most part, the English ear is mildly surprised and entirely charmed. Talk of *lingua Toscana in bocca Romana!* The English tongue on Irish lips is every whit as melodious.

The next pleasure is for the eye. These Irish gentlemen and ladies are good to look at; the men are lithe, graceful, bright-eyed, and one at least of the maidens, with the stage name of Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh, is of a strange, wan, "disquieting" beauty. But I am not thinking so much of what Elia's Scotch friend would call their "pairsonal pretensions" as of their postures and movements. As a rule they stand stock-still. The speaker of the moment is the only one who is allowed a little gesture—just as in the familiar convention of the Italian marionette theatre the figure supposed to be speaking is distinguished from the others by a slight vibration. The listeners do not distract one's attention by fussy "stage business," they just stay where they are and listen. When they do move it is without premeditation, at haphazard, even with a little natural clumsiness, as of people who are not conscious of being stared at in public. Hence a delightful effect of spontaneity. And in their demeanour generally they have the artless impulsiveness of children—the very thing which one found so enjoyable in another exotic affair, the performance of Sada Yacco and her Japanese company. Add that the scenery is of Elizabethan simplicity—sometimes no more than a mere backcloth—and you will begin to see why this performance is a sight good for sore eyes—eyes made sore by the perpetual movement and glitter of the ordinary stage.

But it is time to say something of the vital part of one's pleasure, the pleasure of mind and mood. That, too, is largely a pleasure of rest—and resignation. The mind is steeped in seriousness; the mood is uniformly sad. For anything of the same kind one would have to go to some of Maeterlinck's earlier plays. But that is an imperfect comparison; the Irish theatre is really of its own kind and of none other. Its sustained note of subdued gravity, with here and there faint harmonics of weird elfish freakishness ("harps in the air," Hilda Wangel would have called them) is entirely Irish and entirely delightful. Take Mr. Yeats's "morality," *The Hour-Glass*. An angel gives a man a few moments wherein to try and find means of salvation before he dies with the last running out of the sand. Imagine how the ordinary dramatist would treat this, how largely the hour-glass would bulk in the foreground, how the man would writhe and shriek in the frenzied horror of imminent death. Indeed, you need not imagine it; this very situation fills the final act of Sardou's *Dante*. Tick, tick! goes the pendulum clock. Lo! the pendulum is the figure of Death with his scythe. (Oh, symbolism! oh Sardou!) Remark the practical actor conscientiously emptying out under the limelight the whole contents of the theatrical bag of tricks labelled "Death Scenes." Then turn for a refreshing contrast to the behaviour of Mr. Yeats's "Wise Man." He is agitated, to be sure, but quietly agitated. He hardly so much as glances at the hour-glass. What you are asked to contemplate is the inner rout of his mind. A moment ago he had been so proud of his knowledge! How immeasurably superior he had seemed to Teigue the Fool! In what impassioned prose he had exulted over the folly he

thought he had overthrown! "Though they call him Teigue the Fool, he is not more foolish than everyone used to be, with their dreams and their preaching and their three worlds. But I have overthrown their three worlds with the seven sciences. With philosophy that was made from the lonely star I have taught them to forget theology . . . and with music the fierce planet's daughter whose hair is always on fire, and with grammar, that is the moon's daughter, I have shut their ears to the imaginary harpings and speech of the angels." And now one of the angels (it is the beautiful Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh) with a little word has cast him low. To be saved he must find one whom his teaching has not corrupted. In vain he summons his pupils (one of them a King's son, no less); they think he merely wishes to dispute with them. In vain he calls in wife and children; he has taught them not to pray. And at last it is Teigue the Fool who saves the Wise Man, Teigue who has seen scores of angels, who knows the hilltops where the country-folk spread nets to catch the angels' feet, and who always cuts the nets so that the angels shall not be caught. The whole tone of the thing, as we have said, is grave and subdued, its whole texture such stuff as dreams are made of. A little thing, it may be, but it haunts the mind long afterwards. I can still see the virginal face of the angel, who has stepped out of some Irish Book of Hours, and still hear the wheedling chant of Teigue the Fool—"Give me a pen-nee! Give me some pen-nees!"

Another play by Mr. Yeats, *Kathleen Ni Houlihan*, gives us a whiff—or rather a sigh—of '98. Young Michael Gillan is going to wed Delia Cahel, and old Peter, Michael's father, sits lovingly caressing the

golden sovereigns which Delia brings as her dowry. It should be a merry family gathering, but gradually there steals over all present an uncomfortable feeling that something, they know not what, is going to happen. The vague fear of something impending, unseen—what is that but the “note” of *L’Intruse* and of many another Maeterlinck “early manner”? An old, sad-faced woman enters, begs a moment’s shelter, and is received with a simple courtesy by these Irish peasants which is as “elegant” as their English pronunciation. They ask quietly among themselves who the stranger is, and no one can tell. She sits by the fire wailing and singing strange scraps of song. Many have loved her, but those who love her must die for her. And young Michael is strangely drawn towards her (one thinks here of Little Eyolf and the Rat Wife), and when she goes out leaves father and mother and bride and silently follows her. Then the people outside are heard joyfully shouting the news that the French have landed, and someone who has met the stranger now sees her with the face of a radiant girl. She symbolises the spirit of Ireland. In this beautiful little piece you have the same dream-feeling as in the other; in this as in the other, the people move about silently, as fearing to break the dream, and speak with bated breath.

In Lady Gregory’s *Twenty-Five* there is more solid matter of fact, more of human nature’s daily food. Christie Henderson comes home from America, with sixty pounds in his pocket, to claim the girl he left behind him. But she, who has heard never a word from him, is married to Michael Ford. The Fords have been sold up and are just starting for exile in England. Will not the wife take her old friend’s sixty pounds to save her

husband? No, not a penny of it. Then a way must be found to make her, so Christie gets Michael to sit down to cards, and they play the game of "twenty-five," and by the strangest run of ill luck the whole of Christie's little fortune passes into Michael's hands. Then they all fall to dancing, save the wife, who silently weeps, and Christie starts on his return to America without a wife and without a penny, and yet well content. Mr. W. G. Fay plays Christie in a vein of mingled sadness and fun, but always *pianissimo*.

Yes, they are all from the outset to the end playing *pianissimo*, all hushed as in some sick-room, all grave and, as it were, careworn. No doubt there is a touch of affectation in their methods; they have something of the self-importance of children spliced for service at the altar or "dressed up" for a grand domestic occasion. A style "deliberately adopted" is the harmless little boast of their prospectus. Well, that is a matter of course. All new movements in art are self-conscious, abound in little exaggerations and affectations. Is there not an Irish precept, "Be aisy; and if ye can't be aisy, be as aisy as ye can"? One may commend that to the Irish National Theatre Society. And for ourselves we may be quite "aisy"; for the "deliberate" methods of these enthusiasts will surely lose their stiffness in due course of time. Meanwhile one is sincerely grateful to them for an hour or two of real refreshment, a train of curious suggestions, a series of new "thrills."

## *WARP AND WOOF*

(CAMDEN, June 1904)

O F course Mrs. Alfred Lyttelton's play abounds in faults. Of course her stage-craft is amateurish. Of course she overstates her case. What else, pray, did anyone expect from a novice? More important than her degree of skill or the precise measure of her accuracy is the question of her impulse and her choice of theme. It is a comfort to know, in these days of dramas manufactured for the market, that "indignation" not only "makes verses," but sometimes also makes plays. And a play which, avoiding the beaten track of amorous or domestic adventure, deals fearlessly with some actual remediable evil of our social system, however naïve in conception that play may be, however clumsily written—and *Warp and Woof* is both naïve and clumsy—is, just now, a valuable playhouse asset. The fact is, Mrs Lyttelton, in a jejune prentice fashion, has attempted to do for a corner of London life what Brieux has done for many corners of France. She sees something wrong, something which outrages her sense of justice, and she would do her best to right the wrong by exposing it before a whole playhouse. One knows all that is to be said about the difficulty of reconciling art with propagandism. One is quite aware that the best plays are written by

people whose overpowering impulse is, first and last, to write a play and not a tract. Nevertheless, the moralists and the thesis-mongers are invaluable in the theatre. They keep it real, keep it in touch with the life that we know. The English theatre especially needs them, for it is the most unreal of all theatres, the most frivolous, the most devoid of ideas. Mrs. Lyttelton's little experiment in thesis-mongering, then, crude and faulty as it is, is really more helpful than many a conventional "story" play of impeccable workmanship.

Mrs. Lyttelton sees a wrong. Being a woman, she naturally sees a wrong done by women to women. She sees that mundane and modish women are apt to be in too great a hurry to get their smart frocks home from the dressmakers, and that the dressmakers, under stress of their customers' impatience, are apt to prefer to the alternative of an enlargement of staff the cheaper expedient of "overtime." Thus, between the thoughtlessness of one set of women and the greed of another set of women, a third set—the workgirls—become white slaves, live without proper meals, proper air, proper leisure, proper sleep, so that the coarser among them become benumbed and brutalised and the more delicate perish miserably. Further than that, if the workgirl have beauty and a natural, healthy desire for the *joie de vivre*, she is like to fall an easy victim to unprincipled men. But has the law nothing to say in this matter? Yes, of course, there are the stringent regulations of the Factory Acts, and there are the surprise visits of his Majesty's inspector. But laws can be ignored and inspectors humbugged. The root of the evil is not a thing which "kings or laws can cause or cure";

it is the thoughtlessness of some women acting upon the greed of other women to the detriment of many more. Well, Mrs. Lyttelton sees all this, and is angry—and what does she do? She flings all that she has seen in a heap on the stage, pell-mell, upside-down, anyhow. She shows us the thoughtless women being thoughtless, demanding their frocks within an hour or two of the order, gabbling childish slang ("divvy," "spity," and other odious words which ought to be left to the vulgar tittle-tattle of "our society correspondent"), or rehearsing absurd songs and dances in fancy dress while workgirls faint and die. She shows us the greedy dressmaker being greedy, cringing to her customers, bullying, starving, and overworking her girls, and lying through thick and thin to his Majesty's factory inspector. The inspection scene, by the way, with the girls, working "after hours," huddled away into the next room, then discovered, but lying or keeping mute when questioned, is the one really effective thing in *Warp and Woof*. There is some attempt to differentiate the types of workgirl—the girl who is too stupid to speak, the girl who won't blab "for the honour of the firm," the girl who is afraid of dismissal if she speaks, and so forth. But then this crucial scene of the play does not touch the real *crux* of the thesis. The real business of the thesis-monger here is not to show an "adventure," the attempted deception of a factory inspector, but to expose and to *explain* the root of the evil—mundane thoughtlessness acting upon commercial greed. And just there, I think, is the weakness of Mrs. Lyttelton's play. She exhibits certain surface facts; she does not go beneath the surface and explain them. If she will look at the work of any practised thesis-monger—the aforesaid

M. Brieux, for example—she will see that all facets of the thesis are turned one after another to the light, the *cons* as well as the *pros* are discussed, every point of view is allowed for. There are always several points of view in these questions of social or economic injustice. Evils of this nature seldom arise from sheer, unadulterated wickedness. Grinding employers, unreasonable customers, are acting according to their lights, have something to say for themselves, or, more often than not, know not what they do. There is often (as Ibsen knows, even better than Brieux) a biting irony in the contrast between good, even benevolent, intentions and bad social or economic results. Now you get no hint of this in Mrs. Lyttleton's play. Her personages are all of a piece, all black or all white. Her mundane customer is an elegant, her dressmaker an inelegant, monster; her workgirl is the ideal "victim." This is at once felt to be no true picture of human nature. People are not like that, and the hardships of workers are not to be explained on the simple principle that employers are ogres. The thesis, in short, has not been *approfondie*, and the result is that you have a sense of exaggeration, of the exception being presented as the rule, and of the whole affair being left unexplained. The details external to the thesis—Mrs. Lyttelton's little sentimentalities, little love-scenes, little thumb-nail sketches of (I hope and believe) impossible "journalists"—one need not consider. For, to be frank, these things are not considerable. "Let us go into the boudoir," says a swain (in uniform and gigantic top-boots) to his lady-love. Mrs. Lyttelton would have been well advised to have popped her lovers, her journalist, and all the rest of her "extras" into the boudoir

before the curtain rose, and to have kept them there, under lock and key, to the end.

It appears that some dressmakers have protested against Mrs. Lyttelton's Mme. Stéfanie, declaring that this sketch of a fashionable dressmaker, tyrant, bully, and "sweater," "does injustice to dressmakers as a class." "But," replies Lady Frances Balfour in a letter to the papers, "Mrs Lyttelton does not profess to be describing a class, and had a right, for dramatic purposes, to take an extreme case. All jealousy does not lead to murder, nor all just indignation on the part of defenders of their country who meet with ingratitude to rebellion and invasion; yet in writing a drama of jealousy, or revolt against ingratitude, the dramatist may fairly give us an Othello or Coriolanus. Mme. Stéfanie may, and do exist." This specious passage, I venture to think, bolsters up a fallacy by a false analogy.

Lady Frances's primary proposition is that the dramatist has a right, for dramatic purposes, to take an extreme case. The answer is that it all depends. It depends upon the kind of drama attempted. If you are writing a romantic drama upon the heroic plane you may certainly take an extreme case. It is the very essence of your business to take an extreme case. You are showing passions in excess, great forces of nature let loose. You are picturing human beings at their *maximum* of volition and suffering, in the acutest crises of their fate. Othello is an extreme case. Coriolanus is an extreme case. Hamlet is an extreme case. Macbeth is an extreme case. But even here there are limits to your choice of extremes. You must make it clear that you are presenting human beings. You must see that they act naturally and logically.

according to the law of their natures and the pressure of the particular environment which you invent for them. What is the test of that? The inherent truthfulness of the picture, the impression created in the spectator's mind that just thus and not otherwise would the thing have befallen. The test of truth, then, in this case is an internal test. It is nothing to you whether there was ever a real Coriolanus or a real Macbeth, or whether men are often or seldom placed in the predicaments of these men. The play in which they figure is self-contained, you judge it on its merits, not in relation to any set of external facts. Verisimilitude is all you bargain for, not actuality; you are dealing with poetry, not history. In this kind of drama you may go further. You may stretch your extreme case beyond the limits of humanity. You may bring in a Ghost or a Caliban—provided always that your fantastic inventions fit logically and naturally into the scheme of your play. This, by the way, is what the author of the *Poetics* had in mind when he said that "probable impossibilities" were preferable to "improbable possibilities." And this is what Victor Hugo misunderstood when he argued (in the preface to *Cromwell*) for a drama of nothing but contrasted extremes. Caliban is a "probable impossibility." Quasimodo is an "improbable possibility." To sum up: extreme cases are the legitimate subject of romantic drama on the heroic plane, are indeed its proper subject—always with the reservation of verisimilitude, of justification not by reference to external fact but to the internal logic of the play itself. Again, extreme cases are the legitimate subject of pure comedy. Malvolio is an extreme case. Lady Wishfort is an extreme case. Bob Acres is an extreme case. For this comedy makes

its account—partially, by no means entirely—out of human eccentricity. And again there is the same reservation; the extreme characters must satisfy the internal test.

But what has all this to do with such a play as *Warp and Woof*? Absolutely nothing. Is this play a work of pure “disinterested” art, aiming at interesting us in its characters and conduct for their own sake? Of course it is nothing of the kind. It is a play with a purpose, and that purpose is not the mere offer of artistic pleasure, but the awakening of the social conscience by what purports to be a faithful picture of a particular set of contemporary facts. At once we see that the internal test ceases to be adequate. It is not inapplicable; the play, whatever else it may achieve, has first of all to hang together as a play. But it is far from being, as in the other kinds of drama, the final test. The final test is now the test of external fact; the “poetry” is sunk in “history.” Are there such people as Mme. Stéfanie? Are her relations to her customers and workgirls a true picture of the actual relations of real employers to real workgirls and real customers? It is upon the answers to these questions that the ultimate value of the play depends. “Mrs. Lyttelton does not profess to be describing a class,” says Lady Frances Balfour. Does she not? Then she is doing something very futile, figuring as *chimæra bombinans in vacuo*. For if we are to understand that Mme. Stéfanie is a mere exception, this at once gives away the dramatist’s “case.” What is the use of painting a picture of employers and employed, and then explaining that it has no general validity, that it does not in fact represent a state of things, but only some individual, accidental thing? Does not Lady

Frances perceive that her contention, if just, would really knock the bottom out of the play? I suspect that she does, for she has no sooner advanced it than she qualifies it, and almost withdraws it. "Mrs. Lyttelton does not profess to be describing a class." Nevertheless, "Mme. Stéphanies may, and do exist." They may? That is not the point; that does not help us in the least. But they "do exist." Well, there you have it. And the question is, to what extent do they exist? Is Mme. Stéphanie typical of a class? If she is, *Warp and Woof* is a useful (not a good; that is quite another matter, but a useful) play. If not, not. One must leave the statisticians, the experts in the Factory Acts, and other practical persons to settle that point.

## A CINDERELLA BALLET

(EMPIRE, February 1906)

HERE are many worthy burgesses who seem dead to the charms of ballet. The dumb show oppresses them; they are for ever wishing that "somebody would say something." The rhythm of the dance, now suavely undulating, now heavily beaten out as with hammer-strokes, by turns austere and voluptuous, stately-processional and frenzied-bacchantic, leaves them unmoved. To tolerate ballet at all these people must have the vulgar element which their jargon calls the "up-to-date"; an odious mimicry of the pavement-life outside, to say nothing of the gutter. But a ballet that condescends to matter-of-fact has abdicated its true functions. The ballet is, in essence, the most abstract of the arts that work in the medium of flesh and blood, the most remote from actual life, the most thoroughly "purged," as Schopenhauer would have said, "of the will-to-live." It should transfer us to the region of pure sensation, where things are neither good nor bad, neither true nor untrue, but merely beautiful in line and mass and motion. And yet it has a moral appeal, of a sort; that you may find in the happy faces, the irrepressible tendency to gambolling of the dancers, bespeaking that joy of the artist in his work which to a Ruskinian is the moralising element in all art.

The worst of ballet, from the reviewer's standpoint,

is that it defies review. A blend of various wordless arts, action and plastic and music, it is not reducible to words. If only one could *dance* a criticism of *Cinderella!* One's sense of the exquisite would be signified by a pirouette; praise would have its graduated scale of *entrechats*; one would perorate in a *pas de fascination*. Words can in no way reproduce the direct sensations created by ballet; the best one can hope to do with them is to set forth the resultant mental state, the dream-like mood. You begin in *Cinderella* with a dream of Watteau. There is a park with a lake, a classic temple in the distance, a hint or two of florid stonework in the foreground—very much the scene of "L'Embarquement pour Cythère." A little company of perfectly attired Watteau figures dance a languid minuet. Even more Watteau-ish are their attitudes in repose: youths in satin, with cloak hanging loosely from one shoulder, lute in hand, bending over ladies with long wasp-waists, sacque and panier, and those little turned-up cockaded hats which, by a happy revival of fashion, are to be seen at this moment in the shop-windows of the Rue de la Paix. And all the Watteau sentiment is there, the atmosphere that is a little sickly in its sweetness, a melancholy as of lovers (it is D'Annunzio who has said this of the Watteau sentiment) about to love no more. A dainty child in white, with hair *à la Pompadour* and roses over the ears, makes her little timid yet elegant curtsey to the Prince. Even the programme has caught the right Watteau tone. The courtiers are called Mutine and Celadon, Mignonne and Bel Amour. "Designed and produced," you read, "by C. Wilhelm." I could almost have fancied I read "par Antoine Watteau." The perfect taste, restraint, harmony of this scene are beyond

praise—one of the most beautiful things I can call to mind—either at the Empire or elsewhere.

Cinderella herself is mimed and danced by Mlle. Adeline Genée. It is a flawless performance. Perhaps performance is not the best word, because that suggests a conscious art, whereas Mlle. Genée's quiet charm is something wholly apart from her technical skill, wonderful as that is. It is a charm of native, even homely simplicity; a charm that is never mutinous, coquettish, "disquieting," as the French say; the charm of a child blithely yielding, without a thought of onlookers, to the play-impulse. See her when Cinderella is left alone in the kitchen, after the others have gone to the ball! At first she sits forlorn; then the picture of the ballroom takes hold of her and her face beams with delight at the idea of improvising a little ballroom scene all to herself. Up she jumps, plucks a couple of feathers from her broom and sticks them in her hair, snatches up the tablecloth to make a train, and whirls round with her broom for an imaginary partner. The dainty grace with which she makes believe to eat an ice, to bow to her partner, to yield to a pressing invitation for just one dance more! To every little endearing detail she brings some quaint touch of humour, some ingenuity of invention. As to her technical skill, I have called it wonderful, out of sheer inability to appraise it with proper knowledge. It is dancing without the slightest trace of effort, every step—in reality, no doubt, calculated to a hair's breadth and assiduously practised—having the air of a happy impromptu.

The next best dancer to Mlle. Genée is Mr. Sundberg. Towards male dancers as a rule most of us have a feeling for which the word dislike is too mild a name.

But with Mr. Sundberg's dancing I have only one fault to find ; there is not enough of it. He has just one scene—wherein he gives a lesson, as Court Dancing Master, to Cinderella's stepmother. He enters, fiddle in hand, tripping on one foot and swaying the other rhythmically to and fro—a sort of glorified hop-scotch. From entry to exit he never stops dancing, and every movement is grace itself. At the same time he contrives to give to the whole thing a burlesque air, a mock solemnity, quite in the tradition of "le Diou de la Danse." His coat, with its ballooning skirts, his macaroni wig, seem to have come straight out of "*Mariage à la mode*." This Court Dancing Master is my own particular joy. But for those who like it there is plenty of grotesque dancing of the ordinary "cellar-flap" sort, from Mr. Fred Farren (in a *pas seul*) as well as from Mr. W. Vokes, who, with two others, has a clever "act" under a huge umbrella. Nor can one forget the monkey-like antics of little Black Sambo, the page, who also seems to have been cut from some canvas of Hogarth. The music of the ballet is a *pot-pourri* of tunes and scraps of tunes from Mozart and Mendelssohn to Humperdinck and Messager and Tchaikovsky ; an arrangement which one may be permitted to like far better than "specially composed" music from some inferior hand. This Empire *Cinderella* is, for the moment, the most beautiful stage entertainment in London. Even those who are lukewarm about the ballet must feel the fascination of the scene, with the little curtseying Pompadourish maid in white (is it Mutine or Mignonne?) and the silk-clad page with the lute (is it Celadon or Bel Amour?). It will give them, more surely even than any picture of Mr. Charles Conder's, the true Watteau "thrill."

## *THE DÉBUTANTE*

(EMPIRE, January 1907)

IT has been bruited abroad that Mlle. Genée is going to America. In the native home of the Washington Post and the Cake Walk she will be like a philosopher at a barbarian Court. Is it too late to buy her off? Perhaps another First Folio would do it. London without Adeline Genée will be a mere huddle of pedestrians, a benighted place where tiptoeing is only known by hearsay. If and when Genée departs she will have to leave London her white satin shoes, to be deposited in the British Museum. Théophile Gautier, so long ago as 1868, revealed to the brothers De Goncourt the significance of the ballet-dancers' shoes. "He describes," records the Diary, "the white satin shoe which, for each of them, is strengthened by a little cushion of silk in the place where the dancer feels that she bears and presses most—a cushion which would indicate to an expert the name of the dancer." Thus we should reconstruct the wearer from the shoe. *Ex pede Adelinam.*

Meanwhile the wearer as well as the shoe has been bewitching the town in *The Débutante*, a ballet divertissement in three tableaux by C. Wilhelm. The scene is the Paris Opera House; and the period is 1835—the "palmy days," that is to say, the period of Taglioni the sylph-like, who was, however, not a bit

slimmer than Mlle. Genée, and, very likely, no better dancer. It was a delightful period for the eye, both in its everyday clothes and in its romantic travesties. The gentlemen had tight waists, high-rolled collars, enormous "toppers," trousers strapped tight under the boot, and "frogged" cloaks ; the ladies wore dainty little aprons, huge bonnets, and remarkable *coiffures*. That was the costume of private life, and you have it all duly reproduced in Scene I. of *The Débutante*, the Rehearsal Room, whither comes Mlle. Delphine to join M. Pirouette's dancing class. The pupils are all in long white muslin Taglioni skirts and loll on benches in easy attitudes, like so many pictures by Degas. It is a world—and a whirl—of white muslin chequered by the brilliantly coloured coats of the gentlemen, amateurs of the ballet, who happen to have just looked in. You like to fancy that the crowd contains—as surely a crowd of the period would have contained—all the gay lions of Balzac—Rastignac and De Marsay and Lucien de Rubempré. The military gentleman with the flat cap and "ducks" must be Colonel Philippe Bridau. There, at any rate, is "The Baron" (Nucingen, you hope, rather than Hulot), and the Baron it is who puts forward Mlle. Delphine for the new ballet now in rehearsal, *The Odalisque*, when the première danseuse, Mlle. Florita, throws up her part. Despair of M. Pirouette who tears his Paganini hair; delirious delight of M. Pirouette (who is Mr. Fred Farren, at his most grotesque) when he discovers that Mlle. Delphine can dance like Mlle. Genée, who in fact she is. You, the spectator, are delighted by Mlle. Genée's dancing too, but still more by her freshness, her girlish simplicity, her spontaneity, her "petitionary" grace. There you have the true secret of Genée's charm : the purely

physical charm of perfect grace in attitude and movement, the specific charm, that is to say, of the dancer, *plus* the charm of native temperament unconsciously revealed, the charm of the woman. In speaking of players I have suggested that their ultimate appeal rests rather upon what they are than upon what they do. I have no wish to ride a theory to death, but cannot refrain from pointing out that it is just as true of the great dancers as of the great players. And now the ballet that you have seen rehearsed is actually performed. Of course, it is an Oriental ballet. All romance was Oriental in 1835. The *locus classicus* of the subject is to be found in a certain "Roundabout Paper" concerning "William IV.'s time." "Even in William IV.'s time, when I think of Duvernay prancing in as the Bayadère. . . . How well I remember the tune to which she used to appear! Kaled used to say to the Sultan, 'My Lord, a troop of those dancing and singing gurls called Bayadères approaches,' and to the clash of cymbals, and the thumping of my heart, in she used to dance!" That is just what you get at the Empire. There is the Sultan (Mr. Fred Farren, again, in a wonderful turban), and there is the troop of dancing (fortunately *not* singing) gurls called Bayadères, and to the clash of cymbals Mme. Genée as the chief Odalisque comes prancing in. The Sultan obviously suffers from senile decrepitude, as a Sultan should, but he still knows good dancing when he sees it, and with heavy bags of gold he purchases the fair Odalisque from the wicked slave-dealer Mustafa—the incomparable Mr. Sundberg—who expresses the utmost turpitude of slave-dealing by extraordinary high jumps and twirls. But, of course, it would never do for youth to be sacrificed to crabbed age in this way, and, accordingly,

the Captain of the Guard comes to the rescue, only to be cast into chains for his temerity. Then the Odalisque sues for the gallant captain's pardon in a *pas de fascination*, and all ends happily.

Delightful, then, this ballet of *The Débutante*; delightful, in that it offers a compound pleasure—the purely sensuous pleasure of the ballet supplemented and made more exquisite by the pleasure of historic-literary suggestion. It gives us a glimpse of our grandfathers' generation and the ways of 1835, and shows us, in particular, the way they were accustomed to *visualise* romance in the full tide of the Romantic Movement. And mark the advantage of ballet for suggestion of this kind. A play presenting the period would monopolise your attention; whereas the placid semi-hypnotic state in which you look on at ballet invites to reverie. You have one eye on the stage and the other, as it were, on the well-loved back of this or that volume in your library. You are reading Thackeray to orchestral music. Balzac peeps out at you through a maze of muslin skirts and twirling satin shoes. It is the old story—*que de choses dans un menuet!*



















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